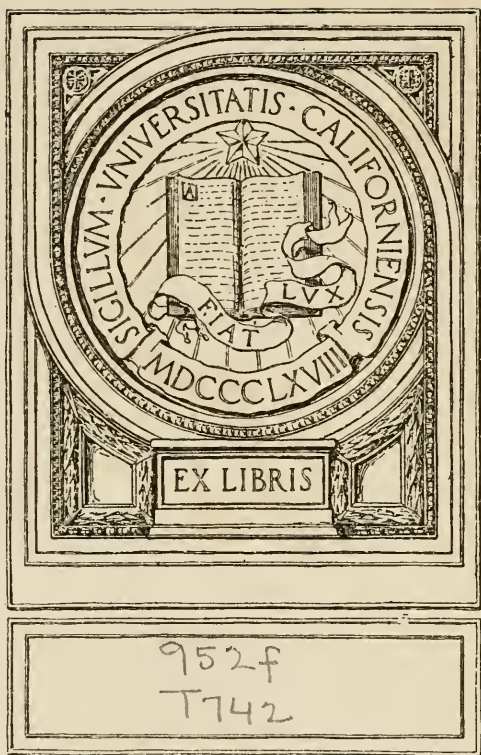


A POET'S CHILDREN  
HARTLEY & SARA  
COLERIDGE  
ELEANOR A-TOWLE











BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LIFE OF A. H. MACKONCHIE

JOHN MASON NEALE, A MEMOIR



CCCLXXV



HARTLEY COLERIDGE, AGED 10

FROM AN ENGRAVING BY W. HOLL AFTER THE DRAWING BY SIR D. WILKIE

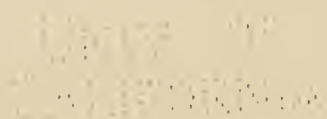
# A POET'S CHILDREN

HARTLEY AND SARA  
COLERIDGE

BY

ELEANOR A. TOWLE

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS



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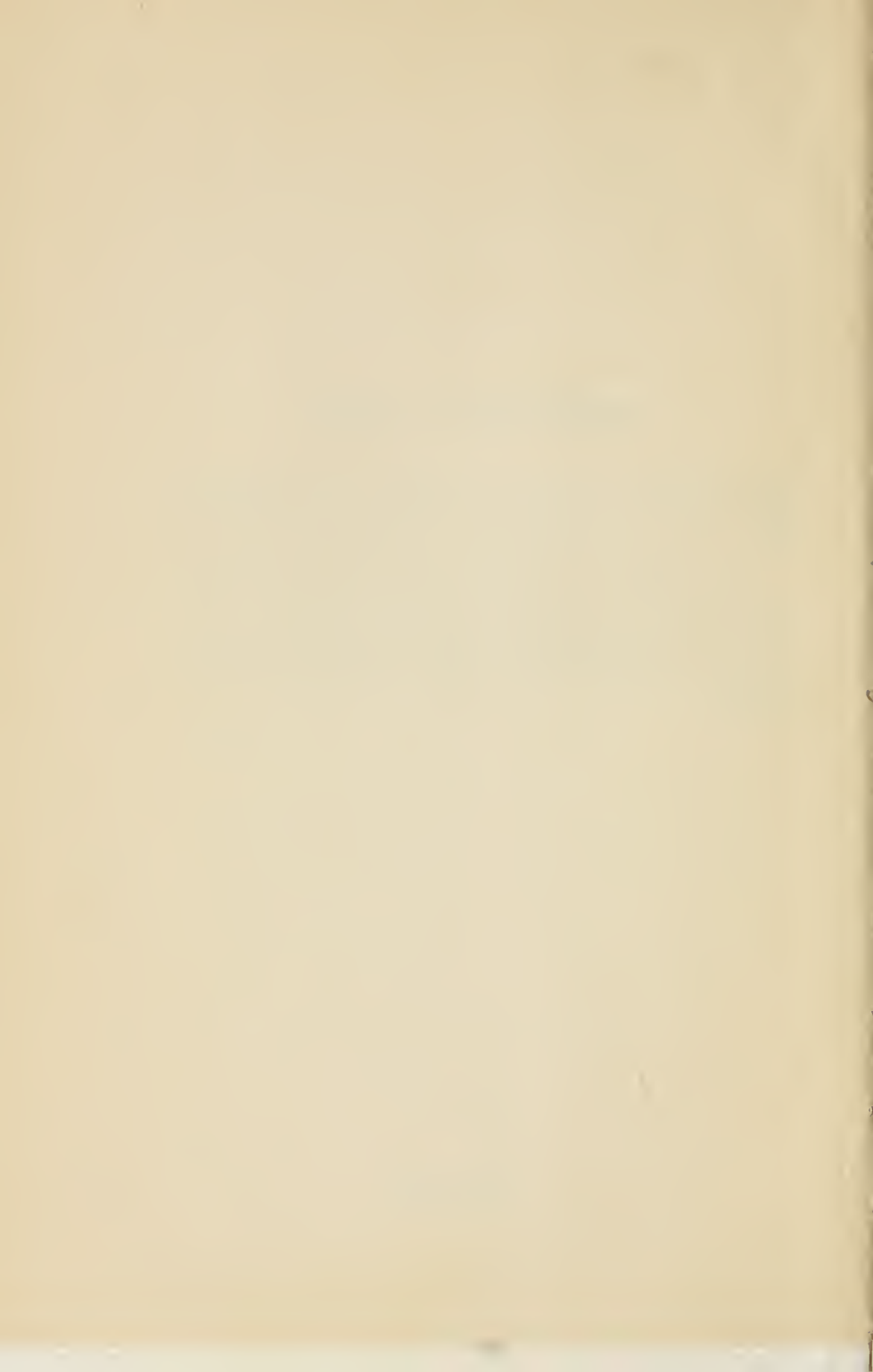
*First Published in 1912*

TO VIRAL  
ADAPTION

## PREFATORY NOTE

**I**N presenting "A POET'S CHILDREN" to the public it should be explained that owing to the death of the writer the book has not had the advantage of her final revision. Thanks are due to Mr. E. H. Coleridge for his kind permission to reproduce the five copyright portraits of Mrs. Henry Coleridge and her children.

I. A. T.





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# A POET'S CHILDREN

## CHAPTER I

### BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

Samuel Taylor Coleridge—First acquaintance with Wordsworth and Southey—The scheme of Pantisocracy—Marriage with Sara Fricker, October, 1795—Married life at Clevedon—Return to Bristol—Literary efforts—Preaching powers—Birth of his eldest child, David Hartley, 19 September, 1796

“**T**HERE was a time when though my path was rough,  
The joy within me dallied with distress,  
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff  
Whence fancy made me dreams of happiness.”

So Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote in reference to the years that witnessed the birth of his children ; for retrospect shed its sunshine over the past, and they were, in truth, years of domestic peace and comparative freedom from the tyranny of morbid fears and paralysing physical disabilities.

“I wish to God I were happy ; but it would be strange indeed if I were so.” Thus he had written on a former occasion, truly expressing his settled conviction ; but

now, under happier auspices, the miseries and disappointments of earlier years were forgotten.

The youngest of the ten children of the Vicar of Ottery St. Mary, he had been, as he said of himself, "transplanted before his soul had fixed his first domestic loves," to the homeless wretchedness of a great Charity School with its unsympathetic crowds and physical hardships. His subsequent residence at Jesus College, Cambridge, though it saw the rapid increase of intellectual vigour and the birth of engrossing enthusiasms, was beset by difficulties, and strangely interrupted by his secret flight to enlist as a private in a dragoon regiment—an episode soon brought to an end by the intervention of his friends, and one which left, as it appeared, but a slight and transitory impression upon his mind. On his return to Cambridge poetry once again absorbed his mind and awakened his most ardent aspirations. His first introduction to Wordsworth's writings led him into new and higher regions of philosophic thought, whilst his almost simultaneous acquaintance with Southey inspired him with a hope that he might yet be freed from harassing obligations and trivial cares. During the long vacation of 1793 the new friends had met together at Bristol, and there, in company with other kindred spirits, the scheme of "Pantisocracy," as they termed it, an ideal community independent of laws or taxes, where brotherly love should obliterate all arbitrary distinctions, had been formulated. Lovell, Southey, Burnet, Coleridge—the leading spirits—were to found a society in a remote and fertile region, where daily toil might amply satisfy their simple needs, and yet unpublished

epics and dramas would provide funds to carry out schemes of philanthropy. Here literature should be appraised at its true worth, no longer subject to the criticism of unsympathetic and unworthy readers ; here too children might be nurtured in innocent freedom, and none should be rich or poor, since a common purse would be open to all alike.

The conception of this ideal state had for a time excluded the thought of possible obstacles and silenced misgivings. Even the more cautious and sober-minded Southey could write : "This Pantisocratic scheme has given me new life, new hope, new energy ; all the faculties of my mind are dilated." And if this was the case with one whose judgments were apt to be weighed and pondered, we can hardly wonder that Coleridge on his return to Cambridge from Bristol, where meetings had been held and possibilities eagerly discussed, should exclaim, "What important events have been evolved ! Southey ! Miss Fricker ! Pantisocracy ! My head and my heart are all alive."

Already a practical difficulty had arisen, but it was to be romantically solved. Each Pantisocrat was to be married. There were household duties necessarily connected with a patriarchal existence, and some high-minded women must be found prepared to barter the dull security and depressing routine of civilized life for the enterprise of the discoverer and the delightful surprises of untrodden paths. The colony, moreover, was to be planted in one of the fairest tracts of the New World, on the shores of a river, the Susquehanna, whose very name breathed enchantment. Who could for an instant hesitate to exchange the dingy streets

and prosaic habits of a city, for a condition of untrammelled liberty amongst the wide pastures, rushing streams, and luxuriant forests of the West?

The penniless Miss Frickers, daughters of an unsuccessful Bristol manufacturer, were readily induced to regard the matter in this light. Perhaps flattered by the young men's confidence, they were prepared (at least with one exception) to fall in love with designs so inseparably connected with the future of the enthusiasts, and were disposed not only to share their aspirations but their fortunes, and to embark upon the wild quest of a visionary republic in an undiscovered country. Their willingness was not destined to be put to so severe a test. "Money, that huge evil," writes Southey's biographer, "sneered its cold negations."

In 1794, when the great project was first inaugurated, Lovell had already qualified himself for admission to the brotherhood by his marriage with one of the Miss Frickers; Southey was engaged to his Edith, and it was obvious that if Coleridge could win the affections of Sara, the eldest sister, family life in the new colony might be started under the most favourable conditions. He was nothing loath. Southey, Miss Fricker, Pantisocracy, had set not only his head but his heart on fire. Eager, persuasive, eloquent, it was no wonder that the young lady's prudential scruples were overcome, and she professed herself happy to share a future painted by his master-hand in such brilliant colours.

The little company were rich in hopes if in nothing else, and it was plain that, when hearts were at stake, no pecuniary considerations should be allowed to intervene;



yet the absence of funds caused a necessary delay in the chartering of a vessel, the embarkation of farm implements, and the wearisome and needful purchase of outfits. This delay was fatal to the fulfilment of their cherished plans. If they could only have raised £150 between them the venture might have been made, for foresight and patience were virtues to which they could lay little claim. They were, however, compelled to regard that modest sum in the light of unattainable wealth. Southey's fortunes were at the lowest possible ebb; he had outraged the feelings of his relations by the adoption of democratic opinions, even before Pantisocracy and Miss Fricker united to aggravate their displeasure. He had rejected the profession they had chosen for him, and had no means of livelihood in prospect save the dazzling, yet unsubstantial, rewards of future literary fame and success.

The group of friends and prospective colonists lodged together in Bristol, with a more practical regard to their frugal means than might have been expected from persons of poetic aspirations and sanguine temperaments; nevertheless, they found it difficult to satisfy their landlady's modest claims. Poems lay neglected and unknown. To offer them again for publication seemed, as Coleridge asserted, "a useless expedient." He and Southey gave lectures, it is true, to large and enthusiastic audiences, but they were not sufficiently remunerative to supply immediate necessities, still less to make provision for the future. At this juncture, when an adverse fate seemed likely to render fruitless all poetic inspirations and literary endeavours, a helping hand was unexpectedly held out.

Cottle, the Bristol bookseller, had learned to appreciate Southey's remarkable talents and amazing stores of knowledge, and, beneath all the wild eloquence of the visionary, had discerned in Coleridge unmistakable signs of creative genius. He himself was a man of restricted opportunities, a verse-maker of no great merit, but at least it was given to him to recognize the promise and the dawn. Moreover, his kind heart was touched. Even from the common-sense view of a man of business, it seemed a thousand pities that so much intellectual capital should bring in no return. Finding Coleridge one day overcome by despondency, he offered him thirty guineas for a volume of manuscript poems. An offer so overwhelming was accepted with silent gratitude. The silence and the grasped hand, writes the affectionate Cottle, showed that at that moment one person was happy.

The happiness, if based upon pecuniary success, was destined to be short-lived. Coleridge's productions were often unconscionably delayed, though Cottle did his best to stimulate industry by an offer of one guinea and a half for every hundred lines of a finished volume. It was all in vain. The poet had what should have been a far stronger incentive to the regular pursuit of remunerative labour in his engagement to Sara Fricker ; but he was still a laggard.

There is little doubt that he had been for the moment, or believed himself to be, sincerely in love; his imagination nevertheless was engrossed by speculative thought, his mind was drifting through clouds of glory, and it was an effort to bring it back to the consideration of the obligations he had incurred and

the duties they involved. Indeed Southey, steadfast, loyal, and punctilious, distressed at his long absence from Bristol, was compelled to seek him in London, to urge that "love the gift was love the debt" and to represent to him that he was in honour bound to return to his allegiance. "Nor would he, I believe, have come back at all," he writes, evidently in high displeasure, "if I had not gone to London to seek for him." This enforced return seems to the unbiased judgment of posterity somewhat hard upon Miss Fricker, especially since to return to her was to revive the romantic and unpractical scheme wherein she had been destined to take a part. But Pantisocracy was at a discount. Marriage, or its near approach, had sobered some of the first votaries. New ties were binding Lovell to the assured comforts and fireside joys of his native land. Instead of seeking the banks of the Susquehanna, Southey was proposing a prosaic journey to Portugal at the instance of a rich uncle. George Burnet, the rejected lover of another Miss Fricker, had withdrawn; others had grown weary or disheartened. Coleridge's fire of enthusiasm alone flared up from its embers, and the brotherhood of universal peace and concord was not dissolved without some harsh accusations of desertion and hot retorts.

Coleridge, still happily oblivious of prudential cares and anxieties, had perforce to descend to the prospect of married life in England. In answer to an inquiry as to how he expected to maintain a family, he could truthfully answer that "he felt no solicitude on that subject." He had already rented a pretty cottage at Clevedon for £5 a year; it was ready to receive his

wife, and on 4 October, 1795, he was married at St. Mary Redcliff's Church, Bristol. Southey for once displayed even less worldly wisdom, for when, about six weeks later, his wedding took place at the same church, he was indebted to the ever-obliging Cottle for money to purchase the ring and the licence.

The cottage at Clevedon was well fitted to be the abode of a poet and philosopher. The garden was still gay with autumn flowers and a rose-tree had twined itself about the chamber window. It was, however, sparsely provided with the necessities of life, and only two days after his marriage Coleridge was compelled to show a practical interest in his household by requesting Cottle to send him with all dispatch, "a riddle slice ; a candle box ; two ventilators, two glasses for the wash-hand-stand, one tin dust bin, . . . a pair of slippers ; a cheese toaster ; a bible ; a keg of porter," and other miscellaneous articles. Cottle not only complied with his request, but sent an upholsterer to cover the bare whitewashed walls with a "sprightly paper"—a great gratification, as we may suppose, to the city-bred bride.

Even here there were days of mental storm and stress. "I am forced to write for my bread," Coleridge states. "The future is cloud and darkness ! Poverty, and perhaps the thin faces of them that want bread looking up to me." These moments of depression were, however, transitory. Mrs. Coleridge, whom he describes in appreciative, though hardly lover-like language, as "an honest, simple, lively minded, affectionate woman," was in some respects at least well suited to compose and cheer his spirits. A glow illumined the distant hills,

and his efforts were crowned with some measure of success. There was, moreover, in spite of pecuniary anxieties, a less impersonal source of happiness at this time in domestic life at home.

Though the paper he had started was a failure, and the volume of early poems published in 1796 by Cottle, brought no immediate results, he was entering upon the period—1796–1800—when, as Wordsworth asserted, his “genius was in blossom,” adding that “the plant was perennial but the flowers were few.” It was in this dawn of hope that Hartley (or as he was first named David Hartley) was born at Bristol on 19 September, 1796.

A return to Bristol was the result as well as an augury of increased literary activity. Clevedon was at an inconvenient distance from libraries and congenial friends. Mrs. Coleridge was unused to a rustic solitude, and her husband was not likely, whatever had been his Pantisocratic projects, to be long content as the centre of a small village community. His “impassioned harangues” required an audience; and an idea had arisen that he might successfully employ his wonderful gift of fluent rhetoric as a preacher. He preached in fact on a few occasions in Unitarian chapels; but his subjects were ill-chosen, and either the place or the congregation were strangely fatal to his powers. The small band of listeners, possibly at first expectant and curious, found it impossible to sit out his discourse and one by one stole silently out of the building, whilst his friends’ amazement at his failure exceeded their disappointment. To Hazlitt, however, who walked ten miles on a January morning



(1798) to hear him, his voice, even in giving out his text, rose "like a stream of rich distilled perfumes," he launched into his subject "like an eagle dallying with the wind," and in his sermon "Poetry and Philosophy had met together, Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of religion." Hitherto religion had been presented to his hearer under the sternest and most literal aspect; now, the mere tone of Coleridge's voice when he spoke of life and death seemed to convey a complete image of both, and from that moment "the golden sunsets, the silver star of evening, lighted him on his way to new hopes and prospects." Nor was it upon Hazlitt alone that he made this impression. He unmistakably possessed qualifications of paramount importance to a preacher; adding to verbal eloquence and an inexhaustible artillery of arguments, the prophetic vision of a seer and a reverential sense of Divine Omnipotence.

Such sidelights, thrown upon the hopes and friendships and circumstances of life, can hardly be misleading; and they bring into definite relief the personal predilections and characteristics so strongly reproduced in Coleridge's children. For no greater testimony could be given to the mysterious force of heredity, as independent of personal intercourse or conscious influence, than that afforded by the prepossessions and dispositions of Hartley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's eldest son, and Sara, his youngest child and only daughter.

## CHAPTER II

### NETHER STOWEY

Coleridge's love for infants—Parental feelings—Removal to Nether Stowey—A memorable year—The "Lyrical Ballads" projected—Admiration for Wordsworth—Hospitality at Stowey—Coleridge's visit to Germany

**I**NFANCY and youth are surely further apart from one another than infancy and old age. In later years there are so many tender parental memories to serve as interpreters. Or, if these are lacking, we may be permitted to company with dream-children, and,

"See their unborn faces shine  
Around the never-lighted fire."

The dreams of youth, on the other hand, are of the future. The Eden of childhood has been gladly left behind, and no angel with a flaming sword is needed to forbid a return.

It is therefore the more curious to discover that, though engrossed with floating projects and schemes of philosophy, and indisposed for the restraints and practical duties of home life, Coleridge, in his youth, could not only idealize the state of childhood, but had a reverent and tender regard for the individual child.

Infants were to him the links mysteriously uniting home and heaven. "What lovely children Mr. Barr of Worcester has," he writes. "After church in the evening they sat round and sang hymns so sweetly that they overwhelmed me. It was with great difficulty I refrained from weeping aloud. The infant in Mrs. Barr's arms leaned forward and stretched his little arms and smiled. It seemed a picture of Heaven where the different orders of the blessed join different voices in one melodious alleluiah, and the baby looked like a young spirit just that moment arrived in Heaven, starting at the seraphic songs, and seized at once with joy and rapture."

At Hartley's birth, though his mother called him "an ugly red thing," Coleridge cried, "There is no sweeter baby anywhere than this." Yet his preconceived ideas of fatherhood were of so exalted a character that the first emotions awakened, even by the sweetest baby the world had ever seen, were of a disappointing nature. He did not feel that thrill and overflowing of affection he expected ; he looked upon the child with a meditative gaze.

"My mind," he notes, "was intensely contemplative and my heart only sad." (With how much reason indeed, if he had but a faint foreboding of the dangers destined to beset the faltering steps of the little David Hartley upon his difficult path through life !) Two hours later, however, upon seeing the child again, he had a happier experience of parental feelings, and records that he "gave it the kiss of a father." Nor does he seem to have been lacking in the early fulfilment of parental duties. From the poem addressed to the "Dear babe



that sleepest cradled at my side," we learn that when, as is the custom of infants, "he woke in most distressful mood," his father hurried with him to the orchard to show him "the yellow moonbeam and the evening star," and at the sight this poetic infant "suspends his sobs and laughs most silently."

Hartley was early subjected to the spell of nature, for though born at Bristol, he was not destined throughout his life to be for long the inhabitant of a city. His father, it is true, had returned for a little while to Bristol and the literary society it afforded; his new friend, Charles Lloyd, the son of a Birmingham banker, a gentle, intelligent, and sensitive disciple, had taken up his abode under his roof and was making a welcome and necessary addition to the domestic exchequer, and though the good Cottle still mourned the lack of steady industry, yet Coleridge was making immense efforts to obtain success and recognition. He took long journeys to obtain subscribers for his paper "The Watchman," visited publishers and booksellers, and submitted to Cottle and his other friends endless lists of poetical works whereof the conceptions were for ever drifting through his brain. He contemplated a treatise upon education, preparatory to taking a school at Derby, where, according to his usual method of calculation, he already felt himself secure of twelve pupils at twenty guineas each—two hundred and forty guineas per annum.

These ideas, unhappily, had no substantial consequences. He again found himself in a "quickset hedge of embarrassments," and when a cottage at Nether Stowey was offered to him for £7 a year he withdrew into the country.

Here, for once, upon his arrival he could write, "We are all happy." At a distance from his old haunts and some old friends, he was not without congenial companionship. Thomas Poole, his neighbour, who had somewhat reluctantly found him the cottage, was a tanner in prosperous circumstances and was a cultivated man with literary proclivities and a good library. Charles Lloyd, in spite of his distressing attacks of illness, had poetic aspirations and was a sympathetic listener. Moreover, for a time Coleridge was not averse to manual labour, and increased cheerfulness was the natural result. He owned an orchard and a garden, and though probably possessing little real knowledge of the art, could describe himself as an expert gardener. His hands, he averred, bore testimony to his industry.

He and his wife had calculated that sixteen shillings a week would suffice for all ordinary household expenses. He was persuaded that a liberal diet was injurious to health, and declared himself thankful to be released from the claims of society in which, he unhesitatingly asserted, he kept silence "as far as was permitted by social humanity."

At Stowey the infant Hartley had, in his mother's opinion, already begun "to flutter the callow wings of his intellect"; and both parents, projecting their minds into the future, were full of educational schemes. Indeed Coleridge, writing from abroad only a year or so later, implored his wife to study Edgeworth's "Essay on Education," and was very desirous that Hartley should be taught to read, though his first-born, not as yet two years old, happily remained unconscious of all that was expected of him.

No rustic pleasures could, however, long occupy a mind teeming with ambitious literary projects. In July, 1797, about six months after his arrival, Wordsworth and his sister came to Stowey to return the visit Coleridge had paid to them at Racedown; and, subjected to the stimulating influence of one whom he regarded as an unrivalled master of language, and for whose poetic gifts he felt the profoundest admiration, all other interests were forsworn, and poetry became, what Hazlitt declared it to be, "not a branch of authorship but the stuff of which our life is made."

If Mrs. Coleridge, nursing her little Hartley, now ten months old, may have found that the entertainment of even such unexacting guests as the Wordsworths made demands upon the domestic resources not to be satisfied without effort and ingenuity, no restricted means could set bounds to hospitality; and when Charles Lamb also proposed to come and see his old friend, Sara, and the "young philosopher," the small dimensions of the cottage proved sufficient to accommodate them all.

Before their visit was over the Wordsworths had found a home for themselves at Alfoxden in the near neighbourhood, partly attracted by the "sequestered waterfalls," deep embowered coombes and soft wooded hills of the west; but mainly drawn to it by the nominal rent of £23 a year, and by the opportunity it afforded of almost daily intercourse with Coleridge.

It was a memorable year. Here the idea of the "Lyrical Ballads" was projected, and here Coleridge wrote "The Ancient Mariner," the first part of "Christabel" and "Kubla Khan." No presage of future estrangement overshadowed the delight of constant

companionship ; and, to the elder and younger poet alike, it was a season of successful effort, bringing to Coleridge, at least, an immediate reward in the sense of the worthy accomplishment of some poetical undertakings already too long delayed.

No censorious judgments or literary jealousies intervened to diminish in the slightest degree their appreciation of each other's gifts. In March, 1798, Coleridge wrote of his friend with sincere if effusive admiration : "The Giant Wordsworth—God love him ! When I speak in the terms of admiration due to his intellect, I fear lest these terms should keep out of sight the amiableness of his manners. He has written near ten hundred lines of blank verse, superior, I hesitate not to aver, to anything in our language which in any way resembles it." And when some one ventured upon a depreciatory observation, his retort was ready and indignant. "Wordsworth," he cried, "strides on so far before you that he dwindles in the distance." Nor was such language merely expressive of a transitory enthusiasm, for nine years later he again wrote of Wordsworth, as "one whom, God knows, I love and honour as far beyond myself as both morally and intellectually he is above me." And again : "In imaginative power," so he asserted, "Wordsworth stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton." Whilst of Coleridge Wordsworth in later life declared, he was the only man, except Sir Rowan Hamilton the astronomer, whom he could call "wonderful."

Nor was it merely a question of intellectual society. Here bonds of personal affection were cemented too strongly, it might have seemed, to be severed by time or circumstance.

In June, 1797, the sun shone with undimmed radiance upon the little house at Stowey. When the "very dear Cottle" succeeded Charles Lamb in its guest-chamber, Coleridge took peculiar pleasure in exhibiting with the proud delight of a proprietor his garden and fruitful orchard, and after the great circuit of the domain had been made, an agreeable surprise for the visitor was in store; for he unexpectedly arrived at the "Jasmine arbour," to find on the tripod table an inviting feast of "delicious bread and cheese surmounted by a brown jug of the true Taunton ale." "At this well-spread table," so Cottle relates, "we instinctively took our seats."

When wants were so easily satisfied the exercise of the most lavish hospitality could make no serious demands upon the slenderest resources; and Mrs. Coleridge appearing with Hartley in her arms, the four men (for Lloyd and Poole were taking their part in the banquet) all looked up and smiled, but the father's eye beamed with transcendental joy.

"The young philosopher" was indeed one of the chief factors in the sense of contented well-being pervading his small circle. "Hartley grows a sweet boy," Coleridge writes in 1797. "He laughs at us till he makes us weep for very fondness." And again to his wife during his absence from home, "I think with yearning love of you and my blessed babies." For after a while the retired existence at Stowey had lost some of its charm. The Wordsworths had had perforce to quit Alfoxden; and soon after the birth of his second child, Berkeley, Coleridge had started with them for Germany. More assiduous for once than the elder poet, he remained abroad, when bereft



of his friends' company, studying the language, matriculating at the University of Göttingen and drinking in the spirit of German philosophy.

It was from no lack of domestic attachments and parental tenderness that he sought fresh fields of knowledge and wider horizons. His infants held his heart in thrall. Berkeley is said to have been a beautiful baby, with nobly proportioned limbs and eyes the colour of "London smoke." Mrs. Coleridge recalls how his father snatched him half dressed from his nurse's arms and, exhibiting him to a passer-by, cried with exulting pride, "This is my second son;" and then, at the admiring comment on the child's size, turned away, half affronted at his being contrasted with Hartley, his eldest born who, though not unhealthy, had been unusually small from his birth.

Berkeley died after vaccination in February, 1799, whilst his father was still abroad, and upon receipt of the intelligence he writes to his wife: "Don't let little Hartley die before I come home. That is silly—true—and I burst into tears as I wrote it." Whatever we may think of the exaggerated sensibility thus manifesting itself, and of the self-consciousness prompting him to chronicle his emotion, there is no doubt that the feeling underlying it was deep and sincere. "Methinks there is something awful in the thought what an unknown being one's own infant is to one. A fit of sound, a flash of light, a summer gust that is as it were created in the still air, that rises up we know not how and goes we know not whither . . . My poor little baby! At this time I see the corner of the room where his cradle stood and his cradle too—



S. T. COLERIDGE IN 1798

FROM THE DRAWING BY HANCOCK IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY





and I cannot help seeing him in his cradle." They are thoughts a mother might have had. No mother could have borne to put them into words.

"Oh ! this strange, strange, strange scene-shifter Death—that giddies one with insecurity, and so unsubstantiates the living things that one has grasped and handled ;" so he writes to Poole. And he was longing to come home "because he had an odd sort of sensation," as if, while he "was present, none could die whom he intensely loved."

In July his wishes were fulfilled and he returned to Stowey. The baby Berkeley had died unbaptized, his father having at that time no belief in sacraments ; but later on his three surviving children were baptized together in Crossthwaite Church.

## CHAPTER III

### GRETA HALL

First visit to the Lakes—Greta Hall—Coleridge's prospects—Dove Cottage—Birth of Derwent and Sara Coleridge—Conjugal estrangement—Southey's letter from Portugal—Arrival at Keswick—Mrs. Coleridge's dissatisfaction

**I**T was in the autumn of 1799 that Coleridge first visited the Lake country in company with William and John Wordsworth ; and it was upon this occasion that Wordsworth decided to take up his abode in the Town-End Cottage at Grasmere, to which he migrated with his sister Dorothy in the December of the same year.

"Summer," Southey wrote, "is not the season for this country. Coleridge says, and says well, that it is then like a theatre at noon ; . . . but at other seasons there is such a shifting of shades, such islands of light, such columns and buttresses of sunshine, as might almost make a painter burn his brushes, as the sorcerers did their books of magic when they saw the divinity which rested upon the Apostles. The very snow which you would perhaps think must monotonize the mountains, gives new varieties : it brings out their recesses and designates all their inequalities, it impresses a better feeling of their height, and it reflects such tints of saffron, or fawn, or

rose colour to the evening sun. *O Maria Sanctissima!* . . . The lake-side has such ten thousand charms : a fleece of snow or of the hoar-frost lies on the fallen trees or large stones ; the grass-points that first peer above the water are powdered with diamonds ; the ice on the margins with chains of crystal, and such veins and wavy lines of beauty as mock all art ; and to crown all Coleridge and I have found out that stones thrown upon the lake when frozen make a noise like singing birds, and when you whirl on it a large flake of ice, away the shivers slide chirping and warbling like a flight of finches."

We can hardly suppose that the "giant Wordsworth" would have stooped to take a practical share in this inspiring discovery ; but the friends stood together on the Druids' Circle looking towards Keswick, and, as Coleridge notes in his journal, "saw the mountains stand one behind the other in orderly array as if evoked by, and attentive to the white vested wizards" ; and walked round Grasmere and Rydal Water on yet unfamiliar paths, drawn by the magic beauty of mountain and lake to find there a fit and secluded dwelling-place for poetic minds. Here the constant intercourse it would have cost them so much to relinquish, was to be renewed. "We are three people," so Coleridge wrote of himself and Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth, "Three people, but only one soul."

It was clear that they could not long be parted, and on 22 June, 1800, Dorothy notes in her journal : "On Sunday Mr. and Mrs. Coleridge and Hartley came. The day was very warm, we sailed to the foot of Loughrigg. They stayed with us three weeks."

The little Hartley was four years old when he was thus brought to sleep under the poet's roof, and in this land of still blue waters and rushing streams and cloud-capped hills, to make, as his father expressed it, "his first love commune with nature."

Greta Hall, on the outskirts of the little town of Keswick, had been built by a Mr. Jackson and divided into two tenements, one being already inhabited by himself and his housekeeper, Mrs. Wilson, the "Wilsy" of Hartley's most affectionate remembrances. The Coleridges agreed to rent the rest of the house. But so pleasant were the relations between tenants and landlord that they soon practically formed one household; the great upper room, as well as the organ-room to the north-west where Coleridge worked, being placed at the disposal of the new-comers.

In this rambling dwelling domestic matters and household cares were relegated to the background. The young couple found themselves at ease. The necessities of life were readily provided, and, for a time at least, there were no pressing anxieties to disturb their peace.

At Clevedon and Nether Stowey Coleridge had been fretted by unfulfilled obligations and harassed by petty debts, and in truth a less sanguine temperament might have reasonably contemplated more serious pecuniary difficulties in the future. These, however, to a man of his character were less disquieting than the every-day restrictions and annoyances of present poverty. The root of all evil had no place in a poet's heart. To his optimistic vision £2,000 a year was secure if he had devoted himself to writing for the "Morning Post" and

the "Courier," for upon this condition the proprietor had offered him half shares in the papers.

"I told him," he writes, "that I could not give up the country and the lazy reading of old folios for two thousand times two thousand pounds—in short, that beyond £350 a year, I considered money a real evil."

To be uncertain of this modest income was another matter, and the practical exigencies of domestic life had already assumed the character of undeserved hardships. Now, however, partly through the generosity of the Wedgwood brothers, he was not destitute of some certain means of support independent of literary earnings, and had no longer need to be troubled by household requirements. His landlord, a modest, self-educated man, was anxious in every possible manner to accede to his wishes and secure his comfort, Mrs. Wilson was a devoted nurse and friend to the little Hartley, and, "at home," as he writes, "all is peace and love." Moreover, from his windows he looked out upon a scene of such majestic beauty that "if its impression could constitute his being, he would have a tendency to become a god."

Possessed by the spirit of the hills, wandering at will by the lake-side or on the heights, by day or by night, in sunshine or in storm, his poems were so affected by local sights and sounds that those who knew the district well might trace in many instances the places of their birth.

The road to Grasmere was the one most frequently trodden, for meetings with the Wordsworths were rarely intermitted. During the years 1800-2 our "dear, dear Coleridge," as Dorothy Wordsworth called him, was constantly discussing high philosophical themes, and

reading new poems of Wordsworth's or his own within the narrow precincts of the Dove Cottage garden or by the fireside of the dark-panelled parlour. He could indulge that gladness in nature, substantially, as he affirmed, a part of himself ; draw in fresh draughts of pleasure from the chosen companionship of kindred minds ; and find even dearer joys awaiting him at home.

His third child, Derwent, had been born on 19 September, soon after the arrival at Keswick, and 22 December, 1802, saw the birth of Sara, his only daughter. They were neither of them of such noble proportions as Berkeley ; but the little grand-lamas, as Coleridge called babies in arms, were to him the objects of tenderest parental devotion. " My meek little Sara," he writes, " is a remarkably interesting baby, with the finest possible skin and large blue eyes, and she smiles as if she were basking in a sunshine as mild as moonlight of her own quiet happiness." The sunshine of happiness in truth sent its transitory radiance over Greta Hall, and at times his hopes were high and his literary ventures full of promise ; yet the gloom which was to overshadow his life fell not infrequently like a black pall upon his spirits, and he was already, as Wordsworth expressed it, " too much in love with his own dejection."

During the summer of 1802 Charles Lamb and his sister paid a visit to Greta Hall ; and upon this occasion felt no regrets for the crowds and humours of Fleet Street. In company with the friend " who when life was fresh and topics inexhaustless had first kindled in him if not the power yet the love of poetry," Lamb was enthralled and subjugated by the beauty of the Lake country. The domestic atmosphere and the curtained



fireside comforts of an informal, but no longer poverty-stricken, household were also eminently congenial to him. Coleridge, as he writes, "had a blazing fire in his study, which is a large, antique, ill-shaped room with an old-fashioned organ never played upon, big enough for a church, shelves of old fashioned folios, an Eolian harp, and an old sofa, half bed." Here the two could smoke and talk at their ease far into the night.

The Coleridges, therefore, though remote from the centres of civilization, were by no means without news of the outer world. Mr. Jackson, too, was a man of sterling worth and sufficiently educated to be a friend and companion to Coleridge, as well as a father to his children. In 1802, moreover, the time was drawing near when the family party at Greta Hall was to be permanently augmented.

On his departure for Portugal, Southey, always a voluminous correspondent, had written constantly to his brother-in-law, painting in glowing colours the attractions of Cintra and the Tagus, begging him to follow, if only that they might return together over the Pyrenees. Coleridge was, however, settled at Keswick and had no desire to leave a place of abode so well suited to him. On Southey's arrival in England he at once sent him a counter invitation, dwelling at length upon the beautiful situation of Greta Hall and the other advantages of a residence among the Lakes. On the right there was "the lovely vale and the wedge-shaped Lake of Bassenthwaite; and on our left Derwentwater and Lodore full in view and the majestic mountains of Borrowdale. Behind us the massy Skiddaw, smooth,

green, high, . . . a fairer scene you have not seen in all your wanderings. . . . In short, for situation and convenience,—and when I mention the name of Wordsworth, for society of men of intellect,—I know no place in which you and Edith would find yourselves so well suited."

Southey still turned longing eyes towards the south, where, if all went well, their joint amusements might supply literary material and defray their expenses. "We will see the great Turk," he cries, with a revival of the youthful enthusiasm once prompting him to set forth for the banks of the Susquehanna, "and visit Greece and walk up the Pyramids and ride camels in Arabia. I have dreamt of nothing else these five weeks. . . . We would drink Cyprus wine and Mocha coffee, and smoke more tranquilly than we ever did in the 'Ship' in Small Street. Time and absence," he adds in graver mood, "make strange work with our affections; but mine are ever returning to rest upon you. I have other and dear friends, but none with whom the whole of my being is intimate—with whom every thought and feeling can amalgamate. Oh! I have got such dreams! Is it quite clear that you and I were not meant for some better star, and dropped by mistake into this world of pounds, shillings, and pence?"

Southey's dreams were not destined to be realized. The Coleridges remained at Keswick and some time was to elapse before an event, as unexpected as it was calamitous, finally drove his own wavering bark to shore. His one child, Margaret, the light of his eyes, the desire of his heart, died at Bristol, when not yet a year old. He felt





ROBERT SOUTHEY IN 1798

FROM THE DRAWING BY HANCOCK IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY



it best for the sorrowing mother to be with her sister, and at Keswick, besides the two boys, Hartley and Derwent, there was the baby, Sara Coleridge, now, in September, 1803, about nine months old, "whom her uncle will try to graft into the wound while it is still fresh." And though at first her infant smiles pierced his bereaved heart, here he recovered serenity of spirit and set himself with untiring diligence to plan new literary labours and complete unfinished poems.

It is possible that, as De Quincey afterwards asserted, the daily evidence of her brother-in-law's self-denying habits and strenuous industry aggravated Mrs. Coleridge's dissatisfaction with her husband's apparent incapacity for regulated mental exertion or remunerative work. She had married a man of genius, and the dangerous step had not been justified upon either side by an involuntary surrender to love's irresistible claims. Nor was there a mutual understanding to supply what was lacking in a union manifestly rather the result of fortuitous circumstances than of dispositions. "Marriage if comfortable," so Stevenson asserts, "is not heroic;" but heroism may be foregone and yet leave no residuum of comfort. Mrs. Coleridge had been swept out from the narrow stream of provincial life to be tossed upon the waves of a troublesome world in an ill-provisioned bark without chart or compass, with a captain at any moment likely to lose his bearings and leave the vessel to drive rudderless upon the rocks. She was ready and anxious to do her part as an affectionate wife and a devoted mother, but could not conceal her disappointment when the gold-mine of Coleridge's genius remained unproductive for want of the will and the effort to work it. Her primary

interests were not intellectual or poetical, and it was clear that no woman, whatever her gifts might be, could have long made Coleridge happy. It was a task, in fact, beyond the power of any human being. She saw him at times inert, solitary, for no ostensible reason plunged in the deepest dejection, or mentally and physically caught up into a storm which shook, not only his own being, but the very foundations of conjugal serenity. At such moments he would wander forth amongst the mountain passes, and, as he writes, "my spirit careers, drives, and eddies like a leaf in autumn ; a wild activity of thoughts, imaginations, feelings, and impulses of motion rises up within me ; a sort of bottom wind that blows to no point of the compass, comes from I know not whence, but agitates the whole of me ; my whole being is filled with waves that roll and stumble, one this way, one that way, like things that have no common master."

Even the philosophic calm and quiet happiness of Dove Cottage had lost their restraining power ; and Wordsworth wrote :—

"Thus often would he leave our peaceful home,  
And find elsewhere his business or delight ;  
Out of our valley's limits did he roam ;  
Full many a time upon a stormy night  
His voice came to us from the neighbouring height ;  
Oft did we see him driving full in view,  
At midday when the sun was shining bright,  
What ill was on him, what he had to do,  
A mighty wonder bred among our quiet crew."

There was therefore a cloud upon Greta Hall, together

with a growing loss of sympathy. One pure source of pleasure yet remained, and one strong bond of union, in the three children—Hartley, Derwent, and the baby Sara, almost equally dear to the estranged hearts of Coleridge and his wife.

## CHAPTER IV

### EARLY YEARS AT KESWICK

Scenes of childhood—Coleridge as a father—"Christabel"—Love for children—Death of Tom Wordsworth—Hartley at Greta Hall—Wordsworth's lines to H. C.—Hartley's moods and sayings—The religion of Letters—Charles Lamb and Coleridge

"**I**F I could but disburse from the treasure of my memory but one farthing in the pound of the mighty debt of happiness which I owe to dream-nourished childhood, and pay the dividend to the heirs and assignees of childhood, they would be rich indeed."

So Hartley Coleridge wrote in later, sadder years; and indeed few children have wandered so happily and persistently in the dreamland of childhood, and few can have aroused such wondering interest in the great thinkers of their day. Brought up under circumstances of precarious frugality, the Coleridge children enjoyed many compensating privileges often denied to those enclosed in luxurious nurseries and well-regulated school-rooms. Their outlook upon the world at large was not artificially circumscribed. No one had time to play down to their understandings. Poetry was in the air, the light of genius flashed, illuminating if bewildering, about their path. They were closely associated with poets and philosophers to whom ordinary ambitions



were of little account, who sought their intellectual pleasures amongst the sanctities of domestic life. Moreover, lake and mountain, crags and wooded vales were to be theirs, as by inheritance, and in singularly prophetic lines Coleridge breathes forth his desire for his firstborn :—

“ But *thou*, my Babe, shalt wander like a breeze  
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags  
Of ancient mountains, and beneath the clouds,  
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores  
And mountain crags ; so shalt thou see and hear  
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
Of that eternal language which thy God  
Utters, Who from eternity doth teach  
Himself in all, and all things in Himself.  
Great universal Teacher ! He shall mould  
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.”

It was not until 1801-2 that Coleridge could be said to be continuously under the tyranny of opium, and during the years that followed, the gloom overshadowing him, his mysterious absences and gradual estrangement from his home and friends, had no power to sadden the lives of such young children. Upon this subject there are naturally many conflicting testimonies. It is clear that at first opium was taken under a misapprehension of its nature, simply as a remedy for pain ; and recurrent pain unhappily demanded a sovereign cure. After Southey's arrival at Greta Hall he wrote : “ Coleridge is now in bed with the lumbago. Never was a poor fellow tormented with such pantomimic complaints ; his



disorders are perpetually shifting and he is never a week together without some one or other," and he added that he was quacking himself for complaints that would tease any one into quackery. But whenever and by what means the deadly seed was sown, it was already bearing bitter fruit. Coleridge himself declared that he first became aware of "the maelstrom, the fatal whirlpool, to which I was drawing just when the current was already beyond my strength to stem." To his anxious friends it might well have seemed incredible that all other powers should be rendered inoperative and his will paralysed by a conscious self-indulgence so fatal to his own interests and peace of mind.

Though wrapped in clouds and gloom, even when upon the mountain-tops of speculative thought, his children were still the objects of his anxious hopes and most affectionate solicitude. The second part of "Christabel" was written soon after the arrival at Greta Hall, and it would seem as if, escaping from the "wizard twilight" and the dark mystery of his conceptions, he had cast his eyes upon Hartley—his own earthly child—playing in the sunshine.

"A little child, a limber elf,  
Singing, dancing to itself,  
A fairy thing with red round cheeks,  
That always finds and never seeks,  
Makes such a vision to the sight  
As fills a father's eyes with light ;  
And pleasures flow in so thick and fast  
Upon his heart that he at last  
Must needs express his love's excess  
With words of unmeant bitterness."

All through the growing alienation from some who had once been most closely united to him by bonds of kindred or affection, Coleridge was observant of his children's characters, and, in spite of fitful absences, no stranger to their daily amusements and mode of life. Sara the baby, and Derwent whom even a poet could only describe as "pretty, fat, and hungry," could not as yet, however, claim more than a small share of the parental pride awakened by the amazing gifts some good or evil genius had bestowed upon Hartley. Wordsworth and Southey shared to the fullest extent the wondering interest the child awakened in those amongst whom he lived. Indeed, it is curious to observe how important was the part that children played in the lives of the literary men of the day, who never appear to have found their presence an interruption nor their daily companionship a disenchantment. The state of infancy is their constant theme. The habits and incidents of childhood prompt their verse. They draw their inspiration from a baby's smile or a sleeping infant. Wordsworth's children are immortalized in their father's poetry, and after the lapse of forty years he could hardly speak with composure of the two he had lost. And Coleridge had not only an inexhaustible spring of parental tenderness, but took a more temperate interest in other people's babies. After Lovell's death he was pleased to find his widow "calm and consoled with her beautiful infant"; and on the death of little Tom Wordsworth, which took place later, at a very critical moment of his literary career, when he was delivering his lectures in London and when "Remorse" was being rehearsed, he was plunged

into an agony of grief. "It is not possible that I should do otherwise than love Wordsworth's children, all of them," he writes, "but Tom is nearest my heart. I so often have him before my eyes sitting on the little stool by my side, while I was writing my Essays; and how quiet and happy the affectionate little fellow would be if he could but touch me, and now and then be looked at."

It is certainly a singular instance of the intrusion of domestic life into the world of letters, that Coleridge, at this time separated from his own children, should have borrowed somebody else's little boy to keep him company at his desk. Hardly, we should imagine, as an aid to reflection!

Southey's closest affections were ever twined about his family; his thoughts, however wide and varied might be their range, returning with unalterable fidelity to his home circle. When it was to be broken later by the death of Herbert, his delicate, studious boy, he writes to Landor in the anguish of his heart: "O Christ! what a pang it is to look upon the young shoot and think it will be cut down." And he knew that he would be understood, for Landor, sharing to the full the exuberance of parental joy, had written to him on the boy's birth: "Thank God! Tears came into my eyes on seeing you were blessed with a son." Wordsworth, Landor, De Quincey, Coleridge, Southey, all alike felt that no house could deserve the name of home which did not include a library and a nursery, and that the doors between them should be rarely shut. Indeed Southey's ideal inhabitants were a "child rising three years and a kitten rising six weeks."

In the house where Coleridge in the organ-room kept solitary vigils, and startled benighted wayfarers by the light burning in his window until the dawn; where Southey with cheerful patience toiled at his desk; and Mrs. Coleridge, kind, motherly but worried, was well content to solve in practice the problems of every-day existence;—Hartley, the elfin member of the household, flitted from room to room.

Over and over again he is brought before us by those slight but effective touches which make the sketch more life-like than the finished picture. We see the little dark-haired boy, small of his age, whom only his father can call beautiful, "a poet in spite of the forehead villainously low which his mother has smuggled into his face"; with glancing, gleaming eyes searching the heavens; flashing, when brought back to earth in an ebullition of childish wrath; one instant full of laughter and the next of tears. He had inherited all his father's talkativeness, the ideas thronging his infant mind struggling to shape themselves into words, though at times he was so lost in thought as to be hardly conscious of what was passing around him. At meals he was a mere dreamer who, as his father observes, "puts the food into his mouth by one effort and makes a second effort to remember it is there and to swallow it"—a great contrast to the healthy, hungry Derwent. He dwelt like many other children in a world of his own, but it was a world of bright and innocent fancies. "An utter visionary," says Coleridge again, "like the moon among the clouds he moves in a circle of his own making. He alone is a light of his own. Of all human beings I never saw

one so utterly naked of self." And the well-known lines Wordsworth addressed to "H. C. six years old," show an equally close and sympathetic observation.

"O thou ! whose fancies from afar are brought ;  
Who of thy words doth make a mock apparel,  
And fittest to unutterable thought  
The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol ;  
Thou fairy voyager ! that dost float  
In such clear water that thy boat  
May rather seem  
To brood on air than on an earthly stream ;  
Suspended in a stream as clear as sky,  
Where earth and heaven do make one imagery ;  
O blessed vision ! happy child !  
Thou art so exquisitely wild,  
I think of thee with many fears  
Of what may be thy lot in future years.  
I thought of times when pain might be thy guest,  
Lord of thy house and hospitality !  
And Grief, uneasy lover ! never rest  
But when she sat within the touch of thee.  
O too industrious folly !  
O vain and causeless melancholy !  
Nature will either end thee quite ;  
Or, lengthening out thy season of delight,  
Preserve for thee, by individual right,  
A young lamb's heart among the full-grown flocks.  
What hast thou to do with sorrow,  
Or the injuries of to-morrow ?  
Thou art a dew-drop, which the morn brings forth  
Ill fitted to sustain unkindly shocks,  
Or to be trailed along the soiling earth ;  
A gem that glitters while it lives,  
And no forewarning gives ;  
But at the touch of wrong, without a strife  
Steps in a moment out of life."



The lines not only evidence an apt discrimination but breathe a spirit of almost maternal solicitude ; "many fears" crowding upon an anxious heart for the unknown future of the unsuspecting child—a treasure the rude hand of Time might injure or deface.

The boy's moods, like his father's, were uncertain and variable. Occasionally he too, for no ostensible reason, was plunged in a dejected abstraction ; and unfortunately, besides being the object of indulgent affection, he was a person of importance, who could almost always secure an admiring audience. He had captivated the temperate Southey and disturbed Wordsworth's philosophic calm. His father, self-engrossed as he was, was deeply interested in his moral and intellectual development, and was distressed to see how sadly he took his pleasure even when pushed in the wheelbarrow on a royal progress round the garden by some of his devoted subjects. When he somewhat injudiciously inquired into the cause of his depression the reply was unpractical and unsatisfactory. "It is a pity," the child answered regretfully, "I is always thinking of my thoughts."

Crabb Robinson in his journal speaks of a meeting with Coleridge at Charles Lamb's in 1811, when Coleridge "related some curious anecdotes of Hartley, whom he represented to be a most remarkable child—a deep thinker in his infancy. He tormented himself in his attempts to solve the problems that would equally torment the full-grown man, if the world and its cares and pleasures did not distract his attention. Hartley when about five years old was asked a question about himself being called Hartley. 'Which Hartley ?' asked

the boy. 'There's "Picture Hartley" (Hazlitt had painted a portrait of him) and there's "Echo-Hartley," and there's "Catch-me-fast-Hartley";' at the same time eagerly seizing his arm with his other hand. Upon which Coleridge's comment was that he must have been drawn to reflect upon what Kant calls the great inexplicable mystery—that man should be his own subject and object and that these two should be one."

Possibly a less prejudiced observer might have found a simpler explanation; yet at this same early age, "he was in an agony of thought about the reality of existence. He had no pleasure in *things*; they made no impression on him until they had undergone a process in his mind and become thoughts or feelings."

No doubt it would have been more wholesome if the ordinary discipline of the nursery or schoolroom had been brought to bear upon the unsolved problems and ingenious sophistries that bewildered his restless brain, for his early education was desultory; his father being better fitted to teach him to think than to read, and his mother most likely engrossed by domestic duties and the care of the younger children—the sturdy practical Derwent, and Sara, whose radiant personality and brilliant intellect were to shine forth in womanhood.

"Moses" was the name by which Hartley in his childhood was known to his intimates—though his Uncle Southey sometimes called him "Job"—the sudden inexplicable bursts of fury ruffling the surface of his usually sweet-tempered existence being supposed to afford a likeness to the great lawgiver. We read of Wordsworth walking from Grasmere to visit Southey and remaining below in protracted conversation with Moses,



who no doubt was ready to ascend Mount Parnassus in such company, and he constantly accompanied Coleridge and his friends upon their walks when almost too young to keep pace with them. In the back parlour, with kind Mr. Jackson and his adoring nurse, Mrs. Wilson, he was even more certain of securing undivided attention; and he would interrupt his play with shells, "on dear Wilsy's worm-eaten table with the beloved check cover upon it" (for so he wrote of these never-to-be-forgotten days after the lapse of nearly thirty years), to pour out strange prophecies and inventions in a torrent of talk almost equalling his father's in its irresistible flow.

Every night he prayed extempore, but not until he was safely and comfortably ensconced beneath the bed-clothes with "Wilsy" at his side to protect him from ghostly dangers; thus in his childhood foreshadowing the piety and self-indulgence of later years. And without any morbid self-consciousness he could truthfully declare he was "a boy of a very religious turn."

It must be remembered that amongst those with whom he was brought up there was no conventional reticence or absence of sympathy to banish religion from the familiar speech of daily life. At the time of the black tragedy in his household Lamb in his misery turned to his dearest friend as one who could be "a very help in time of trouble." "Write," he entreats, "as religious a letter as possible. . . . God Almighty love you and all of us."

And the response was not wanting. "I look upon you," Coleridge replies, "as a man called by sorrow and anguish and a strange desolation of hopes into quietness,

and a soul set apart and made peculiar to God." Nor were these the words of professional consolation. They were the outcome of a true and intimate spiritual experience. "We are all become more religious than we were. God be ever praised for all things": thus Coleridge had written when Lovell died, with a simple if somewhat self-satisfied impulse of congratulation. In the ordinary affairs of life, as well as in Wordsworth's philosophy and Coleridge's mysticism, religion maintained its rightful supremacy, whilst to Southey it was the motive power of daily dutiful diligence and unmeasured self-sacrifice. Thus in its abstract, its emotional, and its practical form, it directed the current of thought. It moved like the Spirit of God of old on the face of the waters beside which the little Coleridges played, and it was not only in the traditional attitude at his mother's knees that Hartley at four and five years old first learnt to pray.

## CHAPTER V

### HARTLEY'S BOYHOOD

Coleridge's absence and silence—The inhabitants of Greta Hall—Dorothy Wordsworth on the Coleridges—Final separation from Mrs. Coleridge—Hartley's dreams and precocity—Ejuxria—Early literary efforts—Childish theology and metaphysics.

**A**LREADY since the arrival at Greta Hall in 1800, Coleridge's absences from home had not been infrequent. He had travelled in Cornwall with Mr. Tom Wedgwood ; in 1803 he had taken a tour to Scotland with the Wordsworths, returning to Keswick no better in body or mind. The spell of the mountain solitudes had lost its power, the sunshine of domestic happiness was obscured by gathering, threatening clouds of hopeless impotence to resist an overmastering temptation. He could no longer, even to himself, advance the plea of ignorance ; and remorse, whilst it aggravated his misery, did nothing to arrest his progress upon the downward path. A spirit of restless discontent drove him to seek relief in change of scene, at a distance from those whose very innocence and love and pity were an insupportable if silent reproach.

De Quincey, better fitted than most men to comprehend his condition of mind, suggests that he was also impelled to fly from "the beauty of external nature," from the mountains and dells and the silent shores of "lakes

where evanescent hauntings of our past and forgotten selves are most apt to startle and way-lay. These are *positive* torments from which the agitated mind shrinks in fear." However that may have been, for over two years Coleridge was a voluntary exile from home and friends ; first at Malta, where he held for a while a small Government appointment, and then wandering aimlessly in Sicily and Italy, his vagrant beggared estate the outward symbol of an inert will and intellectual destitution. He had left affectionate and anxious hearts at home who looked in vain for reassuring tidings, and from August, 1805, to May, 1806, they received no letters at all. His wife and children, subsisting upon the £150 a year secured to him by the Wedgwoods, were apparently forgotten, and the little expectant group of friends and kindred remained distracted by the recurrent apprehension that some misfortune, or death itself, had befallen him.

"And the tidings of his death," writes Southey, "would come upon me more like a stroke of lightning than any evil I have yet endured."

Wordsworth, though more calmly, shared Southey's regrets and fears. But at Greta Hall itself there were some who as yet knew nothing of sorrow : Hartley, now ten years old, absorbed by metaphysical speculations ; Derwent, broad, eager, masterful ; and their little sister, a graceful, engaging, sensitive child, still delicate in consequence of a fall into the Greta when two years old—an event which left an indelible impression upon her memory. Derwent, an imperious elder brother, had been hot in pursuit, and in her flight she stumbled and fell between the rails of the wooden bridge into the

stream below. She was rescued at once by a young blacksmith who chanced to be on the bank, but her nervous constitution had received a shock from which she never entirely recovered. Nor were the Coleridge children without companions. Room had been found in the wide house and Southey's wider paternal heart for the widowed Mrs. Lovell and her child, and upon Southey himself was bestowed in rich abundance the sorrows and joys of fatherhood. Edith Southey was born in May, 1804, and though he had not meant to trust his affections again "on so frail a foundation," her infant wiles soon overcame his prudent resolve. In 1809 he was able to write: "I have five children, three of them at home and two under my mother's care in heaven."

Greta Hall was therefore, at the time of Coleridge's return from abroad, the birthplace of hopes and of children. To him, with shattered health, a disordered imagination, and an uneasy conscience, it could be no abode of rest or peace.

"I found myself again in my native country," he writes, "ill, penniless, and worse than homeless." Yet no man could have had a warmer welcome awaiting him from his friends. In 1805 Dorothy Wordsworth, in a letter to Walter Scott, had declared that if the state of Coleridge's health compelled him to leave Keswick they would also quit Grasmere in order to be near him. They had been indeed perturbed but not estranged by his incomprehensible silence—letters breathing the tenderest anxiety receiving no single word of recognition—and when they heard at last of his arrival in England, in the late summer of 1806, every excuse of inability to write from sickness or



other cause, was accepted with the eager solicitude of a mother to extenuate the shortcomings of a favourite child. Even then Coleridge lingered on as Charles Lamb's guest in London, rather than revisit the home wherein, as he had once asserted, all his earthly treasures were enshrined.

Wordsworth, refraining from condemnatory expressions, merely states the facts in a letter to Sir George Beaumont. "He dare not go home, he recoils so much from the thought of domesticating with Mrs. Coleridge, though on many accounts he much respects her: he is so miserable that he dare not encounter it. What a deplorable thing!" And Dorothy Wordsworth, though more hopeful, is equally distressed. "We have long known," she writes, "how unfit Coleridge and his wife were for each other; but we had hoped that his ill-health, and the present need his children have of his care and fatherly instructions, and the reflections of his own mind during this long absence would have so wrought upon him that he might have returned home with comfort, ready to partake of the blessings of friendship, which he surely has in an abundant degree, and devote himself to his studies and his children. . . . Poor soul! he had a struggle of many years, striving to bring Mrs. Coleridge to a change of temper, and something like communion with him in his enjoyments. He is now, I trust, effectually convinced that he has no power of this sort, and he has had so long a time to know and feel this that I would gladly hope things will not be so bad as he imagines when he finds himself once again with his children under his own roof." If he

can but bring himself to regard conjugal happiness as unattainable she thinks he ought not to be *miserable*. "Suppose him once reconciled to that one great want, an utter want of sympathy, I believe he may live in peace and quiet." This is a scheme of married life too judicious and philosophical to be put into practice, least of all by a poet. Landor, who had selected for his bride a charming, light-hearted girl with more curls on her head than any other girl in Bath, was unreasonably infuriated when, in the midst of the recital of his new poem, she imperatively entreated him to stop that she might look out of the window at a Punch and Judy show; and Coleridge, who, even in his days of courtship, had no grounds for expecting any real community of spirit, was likewise irrationally and bitterly angered by an experience hardly to be described as a surprise or a disenchantment. Mrs. Coleridge was in some respects pre-eminently fitted to regulate a household and bring up children; she had, as Dorothy Wordsworth averred, "many excellent properties"; but her husband, even in a dispassionate letter, could assert, "Mrs. Coleridge's mind is light and unimpressible, warm in anger, cold in sympathy, and in all disputes projects itself forth to recriminate instead of turning itself inward with a silent self-questioning. Our virtues and our vices are exact antitheses."

Moreover, both Coleridge's more acute feelings and Wordsworth's loftier conceptions of the sanctity of the marriage tie, were outraged by Mrs. Coleridge's unconcealed desire to preserve a mere semblance of decorum. It seemed to them incredible, that upon the eve of so disastrous a catastrophe as a permanent



separation from her husband, her mind should be chiefly occupied by its minor consequences, and the stigma she supposed would be attached to her condition in the eyes of the world. Love and hope could, it seemed, be more easily foregone than the position to which she felt herself to be entitled. By November, 1806, irresolution and delays were at an end. A final and absolute parting had been determined upon. Coleridge was to take the two boys, and they were to visit their mother as they would do if at a public school.

For the time, however, little Derwent, only six years old and hardly fit to leave the nursery, was left in his mother's care, and Coleridge set forth upon a visit to the Wordsworths (now in Sir George Beaumont's house at Coleorton), taking Hartley with him. The latter was no unwelcome addition to the party. "He is an original sprite, a sweet companion, always alive, and of a very delightful temper." Such was Dorothy Wordsworth's description of him at four years old, and, in the eyes of his father's friends, time had enhanced his attractions. Coleridge himself was still, as before his departure, solicitous as to his children's progress and welfare, and especially interested in the curious hereditary workings of Hartley's precocious mind. Derwent's prosaic temperament made him a less congenial companion. When his father tested his theological knowledge by asking who made him, he had received a ready but heretical answer: "James Lawson the carpenter, father," cried the future Prebendary of St. Paul's, with unhesitating conviction settling the question once for all. "He sawed me off out of the stuff he makes wood of, and I did not like it."

It was clear that abstract verities had no interest for Derwent. Hartley's imagination, on the contrary, knew no bounds of time or place. When some one said to him, "It is not now, but it is to be," he corrected their loose phraseology: "If it is to be," he said, "it *is*."

Ordinary toys had little attraction for one with such unlimited constructive powers of mind. He turned from mechanical playthings to contemplate with a terrified fascination the animal creations of his brain; strange reptiles and fearful beasts, "whose skeletons grew outside their bones." And he was backward in book learning, for accredited records of history were surpassed by a long line of "future kings," dynasties of his own invention, to whom he had given high-sounding and unpronounceable names—the Rābzeze Kallaton, as well as King Thomas the Third of more ordinary nomenclature.

So fanciful a prophet, so rapt a visionary, demanded a poet as interpreter. It was no wonder his father sought to lighten the sense of inevitable doom and relieve his oppressed spirits in the sympathetic study of his gifts and character. And, in spite of his preoccupations, he found time to busy himself about his son's education, at first with little apparent result. Though at seven years old the boy had been considered a genius by Wordsworth and Southey, he "could not write at all and was a very lame reader." His father took comfort in believing that, loving him and seeing how he loved books, he would come to them of his own accord; and he notes, as of far more consequence, that he had the sweetest temper and the most awakened moral feelings of any child he ever knew. Already a less prejudiced observer had thought of him with "many fears," the

sensitive, unbalanced, excitable nature, giving mournful warning of the troubles to come.

In the technicalities of knowledge Derwent, four years his junior, was at this time not far behind him, his real superiority, as Derwent himself records, being shown in flow of thought and invention. The little brothers were close companions. "By day and by night," as Derwent wrote in reference to these childish years, "we read together, walked together, slept together. Thus I became the depository of all his thoughts and feelings, and in particular of that strange dream life he led in the cloudland of his fancy."

Very early in life a new continent had arisen in his mind to which he gave the name of Ejuxria, peopled with an imaginary nation, possessing a language, laws, and a senate of their own. The language he translated into English for the benefit of his hearers when he poured forth his plans for the future of the nation or related past historical events. It was a realm wherein all manner of natural forces played their part, whose geographical features and boundaries were more clear and definite than any to be found upon globe or atlas. In this kingdom "day after day for the space of long years he went on evolving the complicated drama of existence—" so Derwent records. . . . "The names of generals and statesmen were familiar to me as household words. I witnessed the jar of faction, and had to trace the course of sedition. I lived to see changes of government, a great progress of public opinion, and a new order of things. 'Derwent,' he would say, 'I have had letters and papers from Ejuxria. . . .' Nothing could exceed the seriousness of his manner and doubtless of his

feelings." He became saddened at times by the dissensions of his empire, and when one day, observing his pensive looks, his father asked what was the matter, he replied, "My people are too fond of war. I have just made an eloquent speech in the senate which has not made any impression on them. To war they will go!"

Before he could write well he composed a tragedy, and finding himself in difficulties applied to his father for help. Coleridge, we learn, treated the matter so lightly as to outrage his sense of what was due to the dignity of an author, and in return he declared that he should inform the public "the only bad lines in the drama were written by Mr. Coleridge, senior!"

Stamping about the room, he also dictated to his mother the fragment of a story, "The History of St. Malo, an enthusiastic Reformer and Hierophant." One wonders what ideas the words could have conveyed to a child of his age. As his brother truly says, the art of composition afterwards superseded and in some measure quenched the "unconscious inspiration of childhood," and no finished specimens remain of his early incursions into the field of literature. In fact, his conceptions vanished at the touch of reality. He shrank in great displeasure from the prosaic inquiry of the more practical Derwent as to the manner in which he visited and returned from his distant kingdom, and when explanations were forced from him he thrust them quickly and distastefully aside.

Perhaps for the same reason, he had no desire (even if he had not been singularly wanting in mechanical power) to put his conceptions into outward shape. To

other children, like the illustrations in a book, this is the best part of the story. Hartley, on the contrary, never built the mountains of Ejuxria beside a sandpit, or let loose its cataracts from the gardener's watering-can. He never, like Robert Louis Stevenson,

“ . . . Built a ship upon the stairs  
All made of the best bedroom chairs,  
And filled it full of sofa pillows  
To go a-sailing on the billows.”

And his fairy fabrics crumbled to dust at a rude disillusioning touch or critical gesture.

In 1806 his father began to teach him Greek before he had learnt any Latin, and compiled a Greek grammar for his use. The curious relic is still preserved in the family, with Coleridge's inscription on the title-page and the Greek alphabet in Hartley's own pot-hooks, followed by a rhythmical enumeration of their names. It is truly a remarkable monument of attempts at simplification, containing, interspersed with leaves from the Westminster Grammar, “some interesting philological remarks, and some eloquent writing on the advantages of classical studies,” by all of which Hartley was supposed to be prepared to profit. The book is perhaps even more remarkable for laborious care, and the detailed, painstaking diligence employed to smooth the path of learning.

Looking back to this period with affectionate regret, Hartley, more than twenty years afterwards, recorded the incident. “On the 4th of November, 1806, my dear father presented this book to me, little thinking, I guess, that some pages of it would still be blank in 1830, and still less foreseeing through what dark and miry ways, what



dull vicissitudes of ill, my own fancies would lead me before the last leaf was written. High were his hopes for me, for his love was strong, and finding an understanding and creative spirit in me, ready tears, repentance close upon offence, and simple notions of the nature of ill, he never thought the heart could be wrong."

Nor should we be inclined to reverse his father's judgment. The ready tears and superficial repentance betokened rather lack of moral strength and fibre than want of heart. His faults were patent enough, claims to affectionate indulgence no one thought of disputing. Even in 1800 one of Southey's regrets in leaving England was that he would willingly have seen "Moses" (Hartley) again; "when I return he will be a new being, and I shall not find the queer boy whom I have been remembering. God bless him."

At Coleorton, in the company of his father and the Wordsworths, the child became more of a listener than he had thought fit to be in the narrower circle of less exalted spirits at Greta Hall. In Wilsy's back parlour he had reigned supreme. To his little brother and sister he had been an oracle whose word might not be disputed. His mother had no taste for philosophical arguments, and Southey no leisure to bestow upon him more than an amused attention. His tendency to metaphysical research had not been stimulated by intercourse with other minds; but vague dawns on his spirit of unrealized worlds knowing no bounds of time or space, had given him a curious intuitive knowledge of subjects rarely presented to children's minds.

It must be remembered that the calmer and less interrupted course of domestic life in the beginning of



the nineteenth century; the atmosphere of profounder and more leisured thought; the more serious and less strenuous preoccupations of older people, may have been partly responsible for the speculations of thoughtful children. Sir William Rowan Hamilton's little boy, for instance, when only five or six years old, cross-questioned his father about the mysteries in the doctrine of the Trinity; and being told that he was too young for such matters and had better go back and play with his top, he obediently condescended to flog it about the passages. In the intervals of his play, however he returned four successive times to propound a theory of his own; and "his four explanations of the mystery were the four great heresies of the first four centuries! He discovered them all for himself. I did not," said Sir William, "give him the slightest assistance." His father may well exclaim as he recounts the story, "What an intellect!" It was the same child who, when asked if he remembered his father's friend Aubrey de Vere, could reply, with remorseful sincerity, "Thinking of Latin, and thinking of trouble, and thinking of God, I have forgotten Aubrey de Vere."

Hartley had no religious preoccupations, no serious troubles or classical studies to distract his mind; and his dreams were rather the result of a fervid imagination than of natural piety. At Greta Hall miserable dissensions must inevitably have sometimes cast a shadow over the children. Here at Coleorton he found himself beneath more genial skies. His father was more composed in spirit than he had been since his return. He had vanquished his indecision, and was experiencing

the relief of having taken an irrevocable step—the last plank to which the irresolute cling in their weakness.

At ten years old “the queer boy” was as dear as ever to the hearts of those who knew him. The violent gusts of passion that shook his small frame, as little subject to control as the sudden storms upon the mountain lake, were shortly succeeded by periods of placid contentment or bursts of exuberant gladness. Southey might, in his desire to give him wholesome childish pursuits, provide him with drawing-boards and dissected maps, but his real interests still lay in that far-off land of fancy, the island continent (of which an elaborate map was once in existence) with its cities and rivers, inhabited by many different nations each with its own political, ecclesiastical, and literary code. Here there were infinite possibilities for the exercise of his mental constructive powers, and a welcome refuge from domestic limitations or the enforced acquisition of rudimentary learning. Nevertheless this year, which was to be one of progress and of more practical acquaintance with the world around him, was the one to which he looked back as the *annus mirabilis* of his childhood.

## CHAPTER VI

### COLERIDGE AND HIS CHILDREN

Hartley his father's companion—Visit to London—London sights—New impressions—Ingenious excuses—Coleridge's letter of advice—De Quincey visits the Lakes—Coleridge at Allan Bank in 1808—Sara's childhood—Hartley and Derwent Coleridge at school at Ambleside—School life—Coleridge's breach with Wordsworth—Its consequences

**P**OLITICAL events and their moral consequences had at this time modified the expression of the democratic creed. Even in an amended form, some of its most devoted adherents were no longer prepared unreservedly to subscribe to its articles.

Much had intervened to change the current of thought and opinion since the days when the little band of ardent communistic spirits had desired to found a patriarchal state in a land far removed from crowns and dynasties. In 1792 Wordsworth had centred his hopes for mankind upon the French Revolution; the future, seen in its lurid light, had been transformed and glorified; but its actual consequences, and the crimes committed in the sacred names of freedom and fraternity, had brought a painful awakening. Nevertheless, in 1807 his ardour for the cause of national and individual

liberty remained unquenched. Napoleon, the great European usurper, was to him the despicable representative of irresponsible despotism and a vulgar lust for gain. Coleridge and he were upon this subject in fullest sympathy, and at Coleorton political discussions invaded the hours formerly dedicated to poetry. Southey had advanced still more rapidly towards a deliberate renunciation of republican tenets, until, in later years, the Reform Bill preyed upon his mind, altogether disorganized his spirits, and interrupted the even tenor of his life.

Hartley, already a democrat and to the end of his life the foe of every sort of tyranny and oppression, was, at ten years old, a strong political partisan ; and he wrote in reference to this year 1807 : "Oh ! public affairs. I was then at Coleorton, in my zealous noviciate in politics. What an antigallican was I ! I read every scrap about the battle of Eylau, and was enraged if a doubt of the Russian victory was hinted."

He was not, however, to be long in the country, where, with no external distractions, he could devote his attention to political and poetical discussions. The Wordsworths spent the summer in London with the Basil Montagus (whose little boy had been for some time under their care) and they took Hartley with them.

It may have been in order to solve a difficulty. Coleridge was manifestly unfit for the sole charge of a child. To send him back to his mother would have been a false step and a confession of weakness, and the Wordsworths, like other literary people of their circle, had an apparently unlimited fondness for the companionship of their friends' children.

Yet the doors of London houses are less easily opened than those of country houses to receive chance guests. Basil Montagu had, since he was called to the Bar in 1798, won for himself a considerable reputation as a legal authority, and a man of intellectual ability and literary tastes. He was upon familiar terms with the most remarkable men of letters in London, and by no means indifferent to the pleasures and distractions of London society. Wordsworth described him as "a philanthropized courtier": and he was undoubtedly a man unlikely to welcome the domestic makeshifts which were matters of course in humbler households. He was, however, not only honoured by Wordsworth's presence, but cordial in his welcome to Coleridge's little son, and he and Mrs. Montagu (who both survived Hartley) remained his attached and sympathetic friends through all the disappointments, falls, and reverses of his life.

Nor were they now, in the midst of other pressing engagements, unmindful of the sights and amusements especially adapted to his age. He was taken to the theatre. He saw Kemble acting in "Town and Country" at Covent Garden: the "Wood Demon" and "glorious never-to-be-forgotten 'Mother Goose'—my thought by day, my dream by night," and Mr. (afterwards Sir Humphrey) Davy himself brought some of the marvels of chemistry before the child's wondering eyes. In company with Wordsworth and Walter Scott he visited the Tower, where Scott took an especial pride in pointing out the claymores and bucklers taken from the loyalists at Culloden. Sights and memories crowded upon him in exhilarating confusion, though years after he regret-



WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

FROM THE PAINTING BY H. W. PICKERSGILL IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY





fully records that the economy of the elder bard did not allow him to see the Crown jewels. "It might have made me a divine-right-of-King's man. . . . what might I have been taught to dream of the mysterious functionary who alone could wear that crown and grasp that sceptre in his sacred hand ! Those who think they can revive Catholic devotion by restoring Catholic candlesticks may consider this." Dreams of one sort or another were his natural heritage, and hardly needed to be prompted by external sights or sounds. Though he 'planned' to reproduce whatever he had seen in London, or whatever struck his fancy in reading, "he had not a particle of mechanic ingenuity and took the whole process for granted. Nothing remained for him upon the earth to which it belonged. The scenery at his feet he beheld mirrored in a floating cloud, when it became for him more real and important than the matter-of-fact world in which he had to live." So his brother wrote ; and in spite of the great dissimilarity of disposition no two brothers could have been more closely united. Derwent was even now old enough to be an appreciative companion, and for several years after this London visit they were rarely separated, the following autumn being spent by Mrs. Coleridge, with all her three children, in her mother's house at Bristol.

If the boy must necessarily have listened with half-comprehending ears to the conversation carried on in his presence, 1807 had, notwithstanding, been a year of new lights and new experiences. Not only was he a traveller in an unknown country, but he had quitted the domestic security of Greta Hall, the long, antiquated study with its crowded folios, its disused organ and Eolian harp and all

the familiarities of home life, to be a guest at great men's tables, to hear them talk of national interests, philosophy, and literature, and to see wonderful sights dimly connected with a past of which till then he had heard but uncertain rumours. His understanding was enlightened and, for the time, facts and realities had assumed a more definite aspect. But natural childish instincts and spirits were lacking; and it is quite a relief to hear that on being brought to see Godwin, he had, when younger, given the great man such a rap on his shins with a nine-pin that the philosopher in great pain lectured his mother on his boisterousness.

It is not so satisfactory to learn that when discovered in an act of rank disobedience, his defence was ready: "It was a misunderstanding, father," and Coleridge's comment upon the incident shows a mixture of parental blindness and shrewd appreciation of character. "He is a very good and sweet child of strict honour and truth, from which he never deviates except in the form of sophism, when he sports his logical false dice in the game of excuses. This, however, is the mere effect of his activity of thought and his aiming at being clever and ingenious."

At this time we find Coleridge still full of a desire to warn and guide his firstborn, and in spite of other anxieties, and the absorbing interests of an uncertain literary career, he can give time and thought to regulate and supervise a child's behaviour. How earnestly he begs him to correct his faults and bad habits, not to snatch at things, nor to stand with the door half open but to come in or go out; never to interrupt or talk at meals, etc., etc. Ending his letter, "My dear, my very

dear Hartley, your fond father, S. T. Coleridge," he adds in a postscript: "I have not spoken about your mad passions and frantic looks and pout-mouthings: because I trust that is all over."

It is not difficult to perceive the deep pathetic foreboding haunting his mind, lest the infirmities against which he himself has struggled in vain, the hopeless despondency like a dark cloud upon his spirits, the bitter recollections of past failure, should be involuntarily bequeathed, like a heavy burden of debt, to his descendants. The healthy Derwent and his little eager graceful daughter are, though equally dear, not so much the object of his solicitude as Hartley, whose likeness to himself he must note at times with fearful misgivings.

Another letter of many pages of good advice addressed to him by his father betrays the same keen anxiety overshadowing their relationship, and at the same time gives a very curious picture of the boy, who, at ten years old, was held capable of appreciating the arguments for self-discipline and the reasonable motives for the pursuit of virtue thus set before him. Some passages are too characteristic to be omitted.

"My dear boy, in all human beings good and bad qualities are not only found together side by side, as it were, but they actually tend to produce each other, at least they must be considered as twins of a common parent, and the amiable propensities too often sustain and foster their unhandsome sisters. . . . Mere natural qualities, however pleasing and delightful, must not be deemed virtues until they are broken in and yoked to the plough of *Reason*. . . . You are by nature very kind and forgiving and wholly free from revenge and

sullenness: you are likewise gifted with a very active and self-gratifying fancy, and such a high-tided flood of pleasurable feelings that all unpleasant and painful thoughts and events are hurried away upon it, and neither remain on the surface of your memory, nor sink to the bottom of your heart. . . . This power you possess of shoving aside all disagreeable reflections, or losing them in a labyrinth of day-dreams, which saves you from some present pain, has, on the other hand, interwoven with your nature habits of procrastination, which unless you correct them in time (and it will require all your best exertions to do it effectually) must lead you into lasting unhappiness."

After these early years the intercourse of father and son was of an intermittent, though never of a formal or superficial, character. The whole family sojourned for awhile under Mr. Poole's hospitable roof at Nether Stowey and paid some other visits; but Coleridge declined to accompany his wife to the north, and De Quincey, then a young unmarried man, was their escort upon the journey, fulfilling the delegated domestic duties with the zest and devotion of a neophyte. If a traveller could hardly be said to have secured a modicum of comfort in a chaise containing three children and their disconsolate mother, De Quincey was gentle and cheerful; he made love to little Sara, promised to make her his wife, and considered himself more than repaid for his trouble by an introduction to the Wordsworths at Grasmere.

In spite of the present relations of husband and wife Mrs. Coleridge still retained some hope of renewal of intercourse, and upon Mr. Jackson's death she acquired



the part of Greta Hall he had occupied, thus securing a home to which Coleridge might at any time return. Devoting the £150 he received from the Wedgwoods to her maintenance, this pecuniary help was his sole recognition of family claims, if we except the mournful interest he continued to take in his children.

When he returned to the Lake country in 1808 it was to stay with the Wordsworths at Grasmere, and in reference to his visit of two days only to Keswick, Southey, in not unreasonable annoyance, observed that "Coleridge had arrived at last, about half as big as the house," his scheme being to put the boys to school at Ambleside and reside at Grasmere himself. This scheme, though especially repugnant to his wife as unnecessarily emphasizing their unhappy alienation, was temporarily carried out, and Coleridge took up his abode for seven months with the Wordsworths at Allan Bank, making large demands upon their friendship and forbearance. Nor was the intercourse between them and their friends at Greta Hall broken off; the children in their innocent unconsciousness forming a link that could not be altogether disregarded.

Sara has herself recorded her recollections of this time. She was six years old, a delicate, thoughtful, sensitive child, with the wide luminous blue eyes and slender graceful figure eliciting the admiration of those who saw her in her girlhood and early married life. She was alike wanting in Hartley's unnatural precocity and Derwent's sturdiness, and her imagination was chiefly occupied by the nightly visions to which nervous children are subject; a terror of crouching lions, the picture of Death at Hell gate in an old edition of



"Paradise Lost," the Ghost in "Hamlet," and above all the Old Woman of Berkeley in Southey's ballad. All these unwelcome visitants crowded the dark room and drew closer and closer to the bed where she lay, so tortured by fear that at last she stole down trembling to the parlour below, to be scolded by her mother for foolish cowardice. Coleridge understood the case better. He insisted that his little daughter should be allowed a light; and when she went on a month's visit to Allan Bank, he took her to sleep in his room and kindly, if not judiciously, told her fairy stories when he came to bed at midnight.

Children, when not preoccupied by their own concerns, have quick perceptions. The little girl responded to her father's tenderness, but she was too timid to be demonstrative. She felt his displeasure at the reserve which forbade her to be lavish of caresses, and was uneasily conscious of his jealousy of her affection for her mother. So it was with unconcealed gladness that she returned to Greta Hall and to the companionship of her especial friend, Edith Southey. Though shy and shrinking, she was so quick and agile in her movements as to excel in all games of dexterity, and was a favourite playfellow. For the present she was, however, to be separated from her brothers, and was indeed to know little in the future of daily fraternal companionship.

It was manifest the Wordsworths' house could not much longer contain Coleridge. Vain indeed it was for his friends, in their anxious and persistent solicitude, to endeavour to restore his impaired faculties or rouse his inert will. Already Charles Lamb might have written: "Come back into memory, like as thou wert in the day-

spring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee—the dark pillar not yet turned—Samuel Taylor Coleridge—Logician, Metaphysician, Bard.” For memory alone could now recall the days of even fluctuating endeavour and high aspirations. He saw his boys every week and talked a good deal to Hartley, but was too much engrossed by his own physical infirmities to question them about their books ; and it was no real loss to his children when he drifted back to London.

It was in the summer of 1808 that Hartley and Derwent went as day scholars to a small school at Ambleside kept by the Rev. John Dawes, a remarkable man, with a strong understanding, though his classical attainments and scholarship were not of a very high order. He was respected by his pupils, and would accept no payment for the education of the poet’s children. The boys were lodged at Clappersgate, a small hamlet of the town, where an elderly woman (the daughter of a Westmoreland *statesman*) looked after them in a rough simple way. Out of school-hours there was, however, little supervision, and they spent their time on the hillsides or by the lake, roaming about at pleasure, as far as Hartley’s vagrant inclinations or Derwent’s sturdier legs could carry them. The master was honourable and upright, the tone of the school good, and the life wholesome, and here for six years (those critical and important years from twelve to eighteen) Hartley led a perfectly blameless and simple life ; winning for himself, as in the old days at Greta Hall, the wondering indulgence of his elders, so that Derwent, though evidently proud of the preference, could not help observing that when Hartley merited reprimand or punishment, Mr. Dawes “only looked at

him." "He *is* a genius ;" so he said of his brother, with tender pride.

Unhappily no practical interests were strong enough to banish the waking visions of Hartley's boyhood. His short stature and strange gestures, the involuntary eccentricities no teacher could eradicate, caused him to shrink from the casual companionship of boys, who, when he was younger and more helpless, had made him the subject of idle merriment or trivial persecutions. Moreover, except as a story-teller, he can hardly have been acceptable to an ordinary schoolboy. He never played. He had a physical inaptitude for outdoor games, and his Uncle Southey told him he had two left hands. But at night when the boys were in bed his extraordinary powers came into play for their benefit, and in one unending stream of unpremeditated language he poured forth what they called "The Tale," a voluminous romance which held his hearers spellbound and entranced, and lasted on from week to week, month to month, and year to year, without in any way exhausting the interest of the listeners or his own inventive faculty.

Though the regular hours and discipline must have been salutary, no doubt the lessons learnt out of school had a more important influence upon his mind ; and he had many teachers besides those regularly appointed to give him instruction. He had free access to Wordsworth's library. There his studies were often carried on. The atmosphere, though calm, was charged with poetry, and he became conversant with much in literature that, to a boy of his age, is often uninteresting or unknown.

The breach between Coleridge and the Wordsworths was every month becoming wider, and during a visit

of Coleridge's to the Montagus their friendship received what at the time appeared to be an irreparable shock. It cannot be held to be unreasonable that Wordsworth, who had endured more than most men would have borne in patience from Coleridge's moods and habits, should have given his old friend Basil Montagu a warning that they rendered him a difficult and unmanageable inmate. It seems inconceivable that the Montagus should have made use of words never intended to be repeated, and too likely to cause lasting unhappiness and alienation between mutual friends. They probably spoke under great provocation, and Coleridge, in a condition of physical and mental health wherein any wound would be sure to fester, was overwhelmed and miserable. "Wordsworth," he said, with tears, to Mary Lamb, "has given me up. He has no hope of me."

In the meantime Hartley was, even in the companionship of more robust spirits, failing to overcome his hereditary excess of sensibility. When Coleridge returned to Ambleside to visit his boys, Derwent came in dancing with transport, whilst Hartley turned pale and trembled all over, and when he saw his father pass Wordsworth's gate without word or sign he could not restrain his tears. On such an occasion they might well be forgiven him; at other times he betrayed an unbalanced nature and strange nervous infirmities. He shrank not only from actual, but from imaginary pain, and could hardly bring himself to open a letter for fear of evil tidings. Agitated paroxysms of pity or rage shook his very being, sadly recalling the temper of mind evidenced by his father in childhood when, upon the occasion of a quarrel with his brother, the little Samuel

Taylor fled from the house, to lie all night wet, cold, and stiff, by the bank of a river ; having solaced himself by the reflection, as he said his evening prayer, that his loss must be making every one at home supremely miserable.

Hartley, though equally ungoverned, was of a milder and more forgiving nature. He dreaded combats, and in spite of the peculiarities apt to render him the subject of schoolboy ridicule and the lack of any ordinary means of earning popularity, he went upon his solitary way and was neither disliked nor unhappy.

It is probable he felt more keenly than any one imagined the estrangement between those he loved ; but Derwent, prosperous and cheerful, was ever at his side, and though their father was henceforth to be to them little more than a memory and a name, there were still links mysteriously uniting the child to the parent that time and absence were powerless to break ; and neither Wordsworth in his sorrowful distress, nor Southey in his severer and colder condemnation, would have ever breathed one disloyal word in disparagement of Coleridge to his children.



## CHAPTER VII

### FRIENDS OF HARTLEY'S BOYHOOD

Friends of Hartley Coleridge's boyhood—Professor Wilson—De Quincey—Coleridge's opinion of Hartley in 1811—Derwent's account of his brother's school-days—The generosity of men of letters—Wordsworth's and Southey's exertions on Hartley's behalf—He obtains Postmastership at Merton.

**I**N estimating the force of the various influences brought to bear upon Hartley Coleridge during his school life at Ambleside, the near neighbourhood of various eminent men, besides those connected with him, must not be forgotten. The forlorn position of Coleridge's boys appealed to their natural kindness of heart, whilst Hartley's insatiable curiosity and shifting vivid gleams of high intelligence aroused a desire to cultivate his mind and direct his studies.

In some respects his best companion amongst his father's friends was the Master of Elleray, Professor Wilson; according to Carlyle a "broad sincere man of six feet, and long dishevelled flax hair, and two blue eyes keen as an eagle's." He was a man of exceptionally genial manners and boisterous spirits, a lover of all open-air sports, wrestling, fishing, hunting, shooting, cock-fighting: incongruous pursuits for a Professor of Moral Philosophy. A maker of verses and of whisky punch,



with superabundant physical energy and an unconquerable aversion to conventional restraints, he was, as Henry Taylor asserted, "a very excellent specimen of the Captain of a Free Company in literature."

Hartley was ever happy at his side, though when they walked out together the effort to keep pace with the long swinging strides that sent the Professor on his way by the lake-side or over the mountain path, somewhat interrupted the discourse in which he delighted. In their case the natural order of things was reversed; the clearer, untroubled, sanguine spirit of the man, lightening the nervous apprehensions and melancholy musings of the boy.

In 1810 Wilson (already well known by his writings under the literary cognomen of Christopher North) was as yet unmarried; and so was Hartley's other friend De Quincey—living his bachelor life amongst his books at Dove Cottage, with one maid-servant to supply his simple needs, or those at least that could not unhappily be satisfied by the decanter of opium nightly placed upon his table.

"What am I doing amongst the mountains?" he writes in 1812. "Taking opium. Yes, but what else? . . . chiefly studying German metaphysics or the writings of Kant, Fichte, Schelling."

Yet he was not without wholesome distractions. The near neighbourhood of the Wordsworths had first impelled him to settle at Grasmere; though as time went on he had more and more withdrawn from the study to the nursery. His attitude towards Wordsworth had been one of respect and reverence; but this alone is no secure foundation for friendship, which must be so

constituted as to withstand mutual disenchantments and thrive in acknowledged divergencies of creed and character. Nor could he have been expected to become really intimate with Southey. Coleridge declared the occasional severity of Southey's judgment was the result of his habit of reviewing. It would seem more probable that it sprang from the deeper source of a temperate and austere aloofness from ordinary temptations and foibles. De Quincey calls it a natural reserve ; and though he portrays the poet's character sympathetically, and with the highest expressions of regard, he himself, inordinately sensitive and whimsical, may have insensibly withdrawn from closer intimacy with a nature so alien to his own.

On the other hand, though his whole mode of life and habits of mind formed the strongest possible contrast to those of the prosperous Christopher North, whose fortune of £50,000 must have sounded like fabulous wealth in the ears of impecunious neighbouring poets, when in his company he caught the contagion of his lightheartedness, and at Elleray he was at ease and at home ; yet even then less constrained than when surrounded by his chosen companions, the Wordsworth children. "Kinsey," as they called him, was their household sprite, their favourite playfellow, and the Coleridge boys, who were constantly at the house, made their claim good to a share in the affection bestowed in fullest measure upon the weak and helpless. They did not indeed arouse the passionate love he felt for little Catherine Wordsworth, whose early death caused him such anguish that on his return to Grasmere he spent hours by her small grave overwhelmed by uncontrollable emotion ; but his love

for the innocent minds and engaging caresses of children was an integral part of his gentle, shy, fitful disposition, and at fifteen Hartley was in many respects a child. In outward appearance he was little changed since Hazlitt had taken his portrait at ten years old. His dark hair strayed over his low forehead, his eyes, though at times bright with intelligence, had in repose the wondering, profound, and yet vacant expression of infancy; and his small figure was still clad in the short blue cloth jacket, white trousers, and open frilled shirt then worn by younger boys. He often betrayed surprising ignorance of subjects ordinarily acquired at school, but had an unusual power of assimilating all kinds of extraneous knowledge, and from much conversation with poets and philosophers he continued to amass a vast disorderly store of information providing food for speculative and sometimes bewildering thought.

As yet his eccentricities were not so much accentuated as to cause serious annoyance. They were excused on the ground of a childish incapacity to appreciate the necessity of regulating conduct with regard to conventional standards. And when Coleridge in 1812 returned to Keswick he could write: "Hartley looks and behaves all that the fondest parent can wish. He is really handsome, at least as handsome as a face so original and intellectual can be. . . . I read to him out of the German a series of very masterly arguments concerning the startling gross improbabilities of Esther (fourteen improbabilities are stated). It really surprised me—the acuteness and steadiness of judgment with which he answered more than half, weakened many, and at last determined that two only were not to be

got over. I then read to myself, and afterwards to him, Eichborn's solution of the fourteen, and the coincidences were surprising. Indeed Eichborn, after a lame attempt, was obliged to give up the two which Hartley had declared desperate."

Nor was he less delighted by little Sara's personal charms and intellectual proficiency. At ten years old she "read French tolerably, Italian fluently, and I was astonished at her acquaintance with her native language. The word 'hostile' occurring in what she read to me, I asked her what hostile meant? and she answered at once: 'Why, inimical; only that "inimical" is more often used for things or measures, and not as hostile is to persons and nations.' If I had dared, I should have urged Mrs. Coleridge to let me take her to London for four or five months, and return with Southey, but I feared it might be inconvenient to you, and I knew it would be presumptuous in me to bring her to you. But she is such a sweet-tempered, meek, blue-eyed fairy, and so affectionate, trustworthy, and really serviceable."

Coleridge may have been more than usually disposed to take a cheerful view of matters in general, since his residence with his friends the Morgans had afforded some protection against his special temptation. He had at least realized that he was unfit to live alone; and when Charles Lamb for awhile abstained from stimulants, Crabb Robinson could even surmise that this promising resolution had been strengthened by the presence of Coleridge. In London there had been much to help him to emerge from a condition of passive depression. He had awakened unbounded admiration in the society of those best fitted to appreciate, not only his astonishing

eloquence, but the theology, poetry, metaphysics, philosophy, which were his favourite themes. His lectures had attracted crowded and distinguished audiences. No longer a solitary wanderer, he was often the centre of a group of notable men whose ranks were eagerly opened to receive him, and who esteemed it a privilege to be in his company.

Thus he returned to the Lakes with less reluctance than usual to face parental responsibilities, and was ready to welcome signs of improvement and progress in his boys.

Derwent, an accurate and acute observer, has recorded his impressions of these times ; and he was not so much under the spell of hero-worship as to be unable to give a fair account of Hartley's abilities and acquirements whilst with Mr. Dawes at Ambleside. "His powers of improvisation did not," he writes, "place him at first much in advance of other clever boys in the use of the pen. He had to pass through the ordinary process of learning, and his peculiar powers seem to have been suspended during the operation. His themes and verses were clever and sensible but do not exhibit any remarkable precocity. They were, strictly speaking, *exercises*. He was acquiring, and without visible difficulty, the use of his tools." With regard to the inner life of the spirit that shapes and governs character he could affirm, "His life at school was so blameless—he seemed and was, not merely so simple, tender-hearted, and affectionate, but so truthful, dutiful, and thoughtful—so religious if not devout, that if his after years had run in a happier course, the faults of his boyhood might well have been over-looked, and nothing seen



but that which promised good. An eye sharpened for closer inspection may in the retrospect descry the shadow of the coming cloud. . . . He yielded, as it were unconsciously, to slight temptations, slight in themselves and slight to him, as if swayed by a mechanical impulse apart from his own volition. It looked like an organic defect, a congenital imperfection."

How strangely the extenuating plea recalls Crabb Robinson's observations upon his father. "One could almost believe that an enchanter's spell was upon him, forcing him to be what he is and yet leaving him the power of showing what he might be;" though in a rare moment of lightheartedness Coleridge himself defended his infirmity of will by the assertion that he had so often serious reason to quarrel with his inclination that he did not care to contradict it for trifles.

In Hartley's case no fanciful excuses would at this time have been admitted by those who, with grave forebodings, were taking thought for his future. "The boys" (Hartley and Derwent), Dorothy Wordsworth wrote, "come to us every week. Hartley is as odd as ever, and in the weak points of his character resembles his father very much; but he is not prone to sensual indulgence—quite the contrary—and has not one expensive habit. William will now be enabled to assist in sending Hartley to college, but of course this must not be mentioned, for the best thing that can happen to his father is to suppose that the whole care of putting Hartley forward must fall on himself." About a year later she touches again upon the same topic. "Southey is in London. Perhaps that may bring Coleridge down to see after Hartley, who wants



removing to another school before he goes to college ; for his oddities increase daily and he wants other discipline. But, because he ought to come I fear he will not ; and how is H. to be sent to college ? These perplexities no doubt glance across his mind like dreams, but nothing will rouse him to do his duty *as duty*."

Hartley at seventeen had in one sense outgrown his circumstances and his teachers. If, with regard to his character, hopes still predominated, they were liable to be unexpectedly shaken by some sudden freak of idleness or apparent indifference to his own interests—the interests Hartley throughout his life had ever least at heart. His incapacity and childishness when practical matters were in question aroused both annoyance and compassion, but annoyance had no lasting place in the kind hearts of his many friends, whilst pity only enhanced the singularly deep affection with which they regarded him.

In 1814 Wordsworth was correcting the proofs of "The Excursion." He was legitimately self-absorbed, and, moreover, always conscientiously anxious to secure the serene outward circumstances best fitted to sustain his mental powers and kindle his imagination. Sorrow had set its ineffacable seal upon his home, but his domestic peace remained unbroken, whilst to interfere in the Coleridge family affairs was to be plunged in a sea of disquieting perplexities. Yet in spite of his preoccupations, he is found writing a very long explanatory letter to Thomas Poole ; setting forth the pecuniary and other difficulties of Hartley's proposed University career, and soliciting his advice. "I cannot

learn," he writes, "that poor Coleridge has mustered courage to look this matter fairly in the face; it is therefore incumbent on his friends to prevent the father's weakness being ruinous to the son. . . . I do not expect that Coleridge will be able to do anything himself, but his consent will be indispensable before any of his friends can openly stir in exertions for Hartley. It is a subject on every side attended with difficulty: for, in the first place, it is not easy to determine what the youth is fit for. His talents appear to be very considerable, but not of that kind that may be *confidently* relied upon as a security for an independence in any usual course of exertion. His attainments also, though in some departments far exceeding the common measure of those of his age, are extremely irregular; and he is deficient in much valuable knowledge both of books and things that might have been gained at a public school. But could he be *immediately* sent for one year to a school of this kind, I should be emboldened to hope, somewhat confidently, that such a preparation would enable him to go successfully through either of the Universities.

"It avails little to think or write much about this, till a fund has been secured for his maintenance till he can support himself in whatever course of life may be determined upon. Now, I know of nobody who has declared intentions to contribute to this but Lady Beaumont, who has most kindly offered to advance £30 a year towards maintaining Hartley at the University. Southey has a little world dependent upon his industry; and my own means are not more than my family requires; but something I would willingly

contribute, and if it were convenient for you to assist him, in this way or any other, it would encourage me to make applications elsewhere."

Southey was not less concerned to discover sufficient means to furnish Hartley's frail craft and launch it under auspicious circumstances. In his own youth he had an indifference to fortune and was late, as he affirmed, in making the acquaintance of Mr. Worldly Wisdom. He well knew what the straits of poverty were. He had often walked the streets at dinner-time for want of a dinner, and had managed to forget the uncertain prospect of bread and cheese for supper in the composition of a new poem. He was, however, well aware that Hartley's moral nature was not of the fibre to emerge purified and strengthened from so severe a strain. The storm-blast sending the well-built vessel on its way may be the destruction of a lighter bark.

Already in 1803, at twenty-nine years of age, Southey declared he was growing old, his heart was quieter and his hopes, thoughts, and feelings "all of the complexion of a sunny autumn evening"; but, even if the most sanguine anticipations were fulfilled, no one who knew Hartley could suppose that his sun would set in a clear, calm sky. The brightness of his dawn gave no promise of an unclouded day.

Though Coleridge, at this time residing with the Morgans at Calne, was, as Wordsworth supposed, unable to contribute anything towards college expenses, his friends' efforts were not made in vain. In the spring of 1815, through the influence of some Coleridge relations, Hartley obtained a Postmastership at Merton of the value of £50 a year. An uncle contributed

another £40, Lady Beaumont £30, and Poole £10 a year. The ever-faithful Cottle added another £5; and, "if more be wanted," so Wordsworth wrote, "Southey and I must try to advance it."

It would almost seem that the lack of means in some cases stimulated generosity, and it was so natural and spontaneous as to arouse no galling sense of obligation. When other things were infinitely more valuable, bank-notes could be received with unabashed gratitude as evidences of kindness and friendship, hardly more embarrassing than a present of game.

Parsimony was no characteristic of the men of letters of this period. De Quincey, on his acquaintance with Coleridge, noting his deep dejection and hearing it partly proceeded from pecuniary anxieties, desired to send him, through Cottle, an anonymous gift of £500; Cottle, with immense difficulty and after much persuasion, inducing him to reduce it to £300. Though, in self-chosen vagrancy, De Quincey had had experience of desperate want, he had now come into a good deal of money, and what better could he do than bestow it upon a poet whose privations and distress of mind deepened his reverence for his person and his genius? Following a like impulse, Landor, hearing of all the mythological poems Southey had planned, cried, "Go on with them and I will pay for printing them, as many as you will write and as many copies as you please." This rash and "princely" offer, as Southey justly calls it, was not accepted; yet it surely testifies to the open-handed desire amongst men of letters to make the cause of struggling authors their own. And then, like the cheering gleam from a cottage window

on a dark night, there shines out from amidst Charles Lamb's penury and misfortunes his eager, stammering request to Procter (Barry Cornwall), whom he erroneously supposed to be in need: "My dear boy, I—have a quantity of useless things. I have now—in my desk—a hundred pounds—that I don't—don't know what to do with. Take it."

Wordsworth and Southey had no superabundance of this world's goods, and there was no recklessness in their characters. Wordsworth was ever philosophically superior to pecuniary cares and was contented with his modest competency; whilst the love of those for whom he was working sweetened and ennobled Southey's daily toil. It might truthfully be asserted that poetry was his trade and his study a workshop, but to the sympathetic critic the unstained purity of unselfish high endeavour shed its light upon each closely written page. To men so strenuously engaged even leisure was wanting to frame projects for the advantage of families outside their own. His children's necessities were the result of Coleridge's weakness and of a torpor of spirit most likely to seem unpardonable to minds of dutiful energy and intellectual vigour. Long experience had proved all remonstrances and every argument that friendship or affection could suggest, to be vain. They could not be blind to the impossibility of reinstating him in the place he had once occupied in their regard. Indeed Southey, with humorous accuracy, summed up the state of the case in the assertion that "whenever anything assumed the shape of a duty Coleridge felt himself incapable of discharging it"; and Charles Lamb, somewhat late in the day, put forth the plea that "Coleridge ought not to have had



a wife or children ; he should have had a sort of diocesan care of the world—no parish duties."

Whatever may be thought of his fitness for episcopal functions, the first part of the verdict was unanswerable. And yet neither resentment nor embittered feelings ever quenched the desire of his faithful friends to serve him in the person of his son.

Before Hartley left Ambleside he was summoned to Rydal Mount, and Wordsworth, in Southey's presence, did all in his power to impress upon him the necessity of applying himself strictly to the course of studies at the University, without trusting to his talents or irregular knowledge ; and he besought him to make it his definite aim to gain an independence. From Wordsworth's somewhat laboured account of the interview, it is clear that the gravity of the situation weighed heavily on the mind of his counsellor. "It is our *duty*," he says, in a sentence in which we seem to detect a sigh,—“it is our duty to hope for the best.” But hope arrayed in duty's sober colours can hardly have been expected to kindle a corresponding spirit in a boy ; and Hartley's mind, reaching forward far beyond the immediate future, was better prepared, we may fear, to gather the harvest than to till the soil.

Thus, innocent-minded, but ill-equipped to withstand the temptations of University life, in 1815 he went up to Oxford as Scholar, or, as it was termed, Postmaster of Merton, and deficient both in knowledge and strength, even the weapons with which he was furnished fell powerless from his unpractised hands.



## CHAPTER VIII

### SARA'S CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Sara Coleridge's childhood—Delicacy of health—Early proficiency—Southey as a teacher—"The Triad"—Wordsworth's influence—Domestic circumstances—Charles Lloyd—Recreations—Sara's first literary undertaking

THE reminiscences of Sara Coleridge's childhood are not so full and vivid as those of Hartley's, although she has herself placed some of them on record in the short fragment of autobiography prefacing the two volumes of letters edited by her daughter.

Her birth, on 22 December, 1802, was entered in the family Bible by her mother. Her father himself had carefully noted those of her three brothers. "It seems," she observes, "like an omen of our life-long separation, for I never lived with him more than three weeks at a time."

Though in later life she appears to have inherited his want of physical vigour, she was not an exceptionally delicate infant, until at two years old she fell into the Greta—an accident to which reference has been already made. She always fancied she could recall her dripping condition as she was carried home after being rescued from the strong current of the stream ; and the event had

lasting consequences. She became a fragile, insomnolent child, and one of her earliest memories was of a moment when the oppression of her feelings became too overwhelming to be borne in silence, and she drew her little stool to the side of her Aunt Lovell's chair, and overcoming her usual reserve declared, "I'se miserable." For some unexplained reason it was decided she might be better in health, and consequently happier in mind, if she wore a cap, and from that day until she was eight, her soft curling hair, lighter in colour than her brothers', was partly hidden under a white-frilled cap framing the oval of her fair little face. The thoughtful brows and regular delicate features gave promise of the great beauty of her girlhood, but were of too serious and pensive a character for her age. She was a great contrast to Dora Wordsworth, with her wild, flashing eyes, floating curls, and unrestrained gaiety, a lover of idleness and unlawful adventures; and in spite of the intimacy of the households at Allan Bank and Greta Hall, the two were not in childhood congenial companions; Dora choosing other society for her nefarious exploits, and Sara showing a marked preference for the sheltered domestic pleasures she could share with her favourite cousin, Edith Southey. As might have been expected, Mrs. Coleridge wondered that Dora and her curls were not kept in better order, whilst Miss Wordsworth was sorry to see little Sara Coleridge so sedate and subdued. In 1816 she wrote: "Sara Coleridge is much improved in health and strength and is much grown. She is a delightful scholar, having so much pleasure in learning. I know no greater pleasure than to instruct a girl who is so eager in the pursuit of knowledge as she is. Often do we wish that Dorothy were like her

in this respect, half like her would do very well ; for with all Dorothy's idleness there are many parts of her character which are much more interesting than corresponding ones in Sara. . . . But I am perhaps misleading you. I have no fault to find with Sara in anything ; but yet there is something which made me make the observation—a want of power to interest you—not from anything positively amiss, but she wants the wild graces of nature." When the verdict is considered it must be remembered that Miss Wordsworth is still contrasting her with Dora, and that the hot-house plant, though trained and cultivated, has a beauty of its own not less natural than that of the hedgerow flower. With Sara, even in her first youth, impulsive gestures and any incoherence of speech or thought would have been an affectation. Deliberate words and composed manners were the instinctive expression of her individuality ; and as she grew older they were so manifestly indigenous as to occasion no surprise.

In her childhood there was at least one person who could see no fault in her ; who estimated at their true worth her intellectual capacities and unslaked thirst for knowledge, and powers of unwearied application almost equal to his own—and that person was her uncle Robert Southey.

He had assuredly no low standard of juvenile learning. His own boy Herbert was exceptionally gifted and studious, and of another son he could write that at ten years old he was making good progress in Dutch and German as well as in Greek and Latin. Southey's heart was filled, but not engrossed, by parental love. In his regulated hours he was accomplishing tasks the

mere thought of which might have daunted the most industrious worker; yet, so keen was his interest in his niece's progress, that he found it no unwelcome interruption when the delicate child brought her book to his study, and with a feverish eagerness underlying her outward composure, caught at every new light his wisdom or experience could throw upon the page.

His personality was especially fitted to attract a child. The abundant curling hair above the fine broad forehead, his clear brown complexion and bright hazel eyes, the mobile features, and his countenance, full of spirit and intelligence, were calculated to win even a stranger's admiration. Lord Byron's compliment was none the less sincere for its sting when he declared that "to have his head and shoulders he would almost have written his Sapphics."

Henry Taylor, the most intimate friend of his later years, has given a description of the impression he made upon those who knew him well, almost equally applicable to him in youth and middle age. "The characteristics of his manner and his appearance were lightness and strength, an easy and happy composure as the accustomed mood, with much mobility at the same time, so that he could be readily excited into any degree of animation in discourse, speaking, if the subject moved him much, with extraordinary fire and force, though always in light, laconic sentences. But excitable as he was in conversation, he was never angry or irritable; nor can there be a greater mistake concerning him, than that into which some persons have fallen when they have inferred from the fiery vehemence with which he could give utterance to moral anger in verse or prose, that he was personally ill-tempered or irascible. . . . He

said of himself that he was tolerant of persons though intolerant of opinions." In the "Notes to Philip Van Artevelde" this just, discerning admiration again finds a voice.

"Glory ever new  
Shall circle him in after years as now ;  
For spent detraction may not disavow  
The world of knowledge with the wit combined,  
The elastic force no burthen e'er could bow,  
The various talents and the single mind,  
Which gave him moral power and mastery o'er  
mankind.

His sixty summers—what are they in truth ?  
By Providence peculiarly blest,  
With him the strong hilarity of youth  
Abides, despite grey hairs, a constant guest.  
His sun has veered a point towards the west,  
But light as dawn his heart is glowing yet ;—  
That heart the simplest, gentlest, kindest, best,  
Where truth and manly tenderness are met,  
With faith and heavenward hope, the suns that  
never set."

The "strong hilarity of youth," to which Sara Coleridge could lay no claim, was no doubt of special service in upholding her less robust spirits and encouraging her endeavours ; and it was needed in hours of relaxation to dispel her gravity. Southey had no dignity to be safeguarded, and no fear of playing the fool even upon paper. His extraordinary versatility enabled him to take either the rôle of the teacher or the playmate, and find himself equally well suited to either part.





SARA COLERIDGE, AGED 14  
FROM THE FAINTING, BY WILLIAM COLLINS, R.A.





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He was not Sara's only instructor. Her mother taught her Italian, and a near neighbour and friend of the family gave her music lessons and was amazed at her progress. Her linguistic talents were, however, the most remarkable and the earliest to be developed, her studies in philosophy and theology being postponed to a later age. At fifteen she had already surpassed any expectations that could have been formed of her abilities, and was lightly climbing the hill of learning, regarding each difficulty it presented as a stepping-stone on her way to the summit.

The painter, William Collins, wrote of her at this age as Coleridge's "elegant daughter Sara, a most interesting creature," and made a sketch of her in the character of the Highland Girl, seated under a tree; and in "The Triad," as late as 1828, Wordsworth drew a more finished portrait of one almost as well known to him as his own daughter.

" 'Last of the Three, though eldest born,  
Reveal thyself like pensive Morn,  
Touched by the skylark's earliest note,  
Ere humbler gladness be afloat ;  
But whether in the semblance drest  
Of Dawn—or Eve, fair vision of the west,  
Come with each anxious hope subdued  
By woman's gentle fortitude,  
Each grief, through meekness, settling into rest.  
Or I would hail thee when some high-wrought page,  
Of a closed volume lingering in thy hand,  
Has raised thy spirit to a peaceful stand  
Among the glories of a happier age.  
Her brow hath opened on me—see it there  
Brightening the umbrage of her hair ;

So gleams the crescent moon, that loves  
To be descried through shady groves.  
Tenderest bloom is on her cheek ;  
Wish not for a richer streak ;  
Nor dread the depth of meditative eye ;  
But let thy love, upon that azure field  
Of thoughtfulness and beauty, yield  
Its homage offered up in purity.  
What wouldst thou more ? In sunny glade,  
Or under leaves of thickest shade,  
Was such a stillness e'er diffused  
Since earth grew calm while angels mused ?  
Softly she treads, as if her foot were loth  
To crush the mountain dew-drops—soon to melt  
On the flower's breast ; as if she felt  
That flowers themselves, whate'er their hue,  
With all their fragrance, all their glistening,  
Call to the heart for inward listening—  
And though for bridal wreaths and tokens true  
Welcomed wisely ; though a growth  
Which the careless shepherd sleeps on,  
As fitly sprung from turf the mourner weeps on,  
And without wrong are cropped the marble tomb  
to strew."

To Wordsworth Sara herself declared she owed the greatest debt of gratitude for his guidance and influence in the realms of imaginative and intellectual thought ; but, both by word and example, Southey had done more than any other to impress upon her the paramount claims of conscience and duty. They both gave her encouragement in her literary pursuits and put their books at her disposal.

Southey's library was a curious contrast to his limited means and usually rigid abstinence from self-gratifying

expenditure. His assured income was £145, with the Laureateship (£90) added, out of which he paid his life insurance. The dues of authorship were fluctuating, and often scanty, though latterly he received £100 for a "Quarterly Review" article, and as much as £1,000 for his "History of the Peninsular War." Yet his books at the time of his death numbered 14,000 volumes, many of them being rare and valuable. Thus Sara was not subject to the ordinary restrictions of dwellers in a remote country place with regard to books, and she was ardently desirous of using her opportunities.

There were other houses besides Rydal Mount (of which the Wordsworths took possession in 1813), where she was welcomed, not so much on account of her attainments, as for her gentle, gracious ways and observant thoughtfulness. At Brathay, her father's friend, Charles Lloyd, was always ready to receive his children. His enthusiasm for Coleridge's poetry survived in spite of personal disenchantments, and now, though his malady had disordered his nerves and to some extent affected his mind, he was still the same refined, sensitive, benevolent, and cultivated person who, in the days of brightest hopes and greatest penury, had once been a member of the Coleridge household. He was well versed in French and Italian literature, and published a translation of Alfieri and some original poetry.

Hartley, who later on witnessed the decline of his physical and mental powers, was greatly attached to him. "I remember dear Charles Lloyd," he wrote, "reading Pope's translation of 'Statius' in the little drawing-room at Old Brathay. The room, the furniture,

the little 12mo Pope are all before me. . . . Lloyd appreciated Pope as rightly as any man I ever knew, which I ascribe partly to his intelligent enjoyment of French writers, tempered as it was with reverent admiration for the greater English."

With the paralysing dread of mental derangement hanging over him, Lloyd sought to surround himself with brightness and innocence as his surest safeguards. He was well off, and a large portion of his income was spent in hospitality. Diffident and timid, he could only be induced to converse upon literary subjects to a thoroughly sympathetic auditor, but De Quincey noted, with pitiful admiration, his subtle criticisms, impromptu analysis of character; and, when surprised into confidence, an "eloquence, keenness of distinction, and a felicity of phrase which were perfectly admirable." He was specially endeared to the younger members of his friends' families by his ready participation in their pleasures, and his willingness in providing them. The house at Old Brathay was filled evening after evening with music and dancing. The master sat apart, fearfully noting within himself the gradual growth of the fatal disease "stealing over the else untroubled azure of his life"; whilst his young wife, in the midst of the dance, cast troubled glances at her "poor Charles." And yet, surely by some miracle of a protecting Providence, though hopeless, solitary, unutterably sad, he still loved the sound of the children's laughter and the sunshine on the current of young life as it swept by. No wonder that the children, happily undiscerning the confusion of his mind, were in times of sickness and distress his chosen companions; they at least were not watching



the symptoms from which he strove in vain to divert his own thoughts, and they had no cause to be afraid of him.

Nor was it only at Old Brathay that Sara Coleridge was drawn from the studies she loved, to mingle with others of her own age in their amusements. She was not destined, like her elder brother, to be an almost life-long inhabitant of the Lake country, nor to wander in later life about the mountains, and in their solitudes find a refuge from the adverse perplexities of existence. But she had an innate love of the charm and beauty of nature; the varying hues on the still waters, the flush of dawn and the pensive light of evening upon the hills, the mystery of woodland glades, and the prodigality of spring in flower and bud and leaf; all these were her joy in girlhood and treasured memories in years to come.

There were many days when the inhabitants of Greta Hall joined with the Wordsworths, or other neighbours, to make holiday beneath the trees or upon the hills. Wordsworth would be roused from his abstraction and forbear to recite his latest poem, and Southey, the breadwinner, would leave his books and desk to head the party, and be the very mainspring of gay enjoyment. Such interludes very seasonably varied the studious atmosphere of Greta Hall, where daily avocations were frequently so ordered as to leave too little time for the happy idleness wherein youth reaps the golden harvest others have sown.

During these years at Keswick Sara Coleridge, with a growing but modest confidence in her own powers, and with almost too unremitting diligence, was ever



turning her attention to fresh branches of learning. At five-and-twenty she had made herself acquainted with the leading Greek and Latin classics and was proficient in four modern languages: German, French, Italian, and Spanish.

There was no sense of strained effort, no burden to be borne, she was upheld by the enthusiasm of the discoverer, for in some of these subjects she was chiefly self-taught; nevertheless, before she was twenty she had laid her favourite pursuits aside, to undertake a long laborious piece of work—her first literary production.

It was not in vain that Southey had set his high example of patient uncomplaining industry. Day by day, with his unread books around him, and the epics and poems of whose prospective merits he felt such hopeful assurance still unwritten, he toiled at the close pages of his *Histories of Brazil* and of the *Peninsular War*, for which he had, as one of his critics truly observed, amassed an immense amount of minute dull learning. His household knew better how to appraise him at his true worth; and upon Sara, in spite of her restrained emotions (defending her, even in her youth, from the intoxicating delights of hero-worship), the unconscious nobility of his character had made an impression never to be effaced.

The large household subsisted mainly upon the results of his pen, and there were many cares besetting it of which the children, as they grew older, could not but be aware. Mrs. Coleridge was not of a nature to accept disappointments or meet sorrows in silence; and outside the study door there were various petty

difficulties, and inevitable, if sometimes unnecessarily querulous, lamentations.

Sara had none of the budding hardness so often the accompaniment of mental or spiritual immaturity. Her wistful outlook upon the world was easily dimmed and her spirits were not sufficiently strong to resist depressing circumstances; yet she could at least exert the strength she possessed to ease the weight of money anxieties and relieve the sense of helplessness to which others had succumbed.

Hartley had been provided for; and all that had been done for him had proved, as we shall see, to be of no avail. Upon Derwent the family hopes might be legitimately centred. Derwent was no erratic genius. He was, as in his childhood, healthy, practical, upright, with strong if not brilliant intellectual capabilities; and for him too, Wordsworth and Southey were taking anxious thought.

A work to be issued under the unpromising title of "An Account of the Albigones, an Equestrian People of Paraguay," had presumably been sent to Southey to be translated from the Latin of Martin Dobrizhoffer, eighteen years a missionary in that country, and even Southey's indefatigable spirit might have shrunk from the task.

But Sara had a strong incentive in her desire to make a contribution towards Derwent's expenses at college. She undertook the work, and before she was twenty it was published, though not with her name, in three octavo volumes, the remuneration she received (£115) being, after all, not needed for the purpose prompting the accomplishment of the wearisome under-

taking. Charles Lamb might well speak of her as the "unobtrusive quiet soul, who digged her noiseless way so perseveringly through that rugged Paraguay mine. How she Dobrizhoffer'd it all puzzles my slender latinity to conjecture."

But her father took another view of the matter and wrote of her work with affectionate admiration.

"My dear daughter's translation of this book is, in my judgment, unsurpassed for pure mother-English by anything I have read for a long time."

## CHAPTER IX

### LONDON AND KESWICK

S.T. Coleridge in London—Poems and poets 1810-17—"Remorse" acted—Publication of "Christabel"—Coleridge at Highgate—Derwent's prospects—Crabb Robinson on Hartley, Derwent, and Sara—Children's manners—Hartley in London and at Stowey—Vacation at Keswick, 1818

WHILST Sara at Greta Hall was making advances in intellectual knowledge and culture of which the extraordinary rapidity was powerless to disturb her mental equilibrium; and whilst Hartley, during his first years at Oxford, was giving as yet unbroken promises of assiduity and success, their father, though he attracted to himself all that was most influential and interesting in the cultivated world of London, was still a victim to opium; by day beset by inoperative abhorrence and remorse, and above all dreading "the howling wilderness of sleep."

He had composed the "Biographia Literaria" at Calne, but in 1816 he returned to London and Charles Lamb wrote: "Nature who conducts every creature by instinct to its best end, has skilfully directed Coleridge to take up his abode in a Chemist's Laboratory in Norfolk Street. She might as well have sent a Helluo Librorum for cure to the Vatican. God keep him inviolate amongst the traps and pitfalls."

He had at least one safeguard ; he was not isolated as in the country, and he was sought by those best fitted to appreciate and rekindle his genius.

The years immediately preceding his domestication under the Gillmans' care at Highgate had been abnormally rich in poetical works and literary ventures.

Since the printer was said to have been intoxicated by being called upon to print "Madoc" and "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" at the same time, publications had crowded thickly upon one another. English literature no longer reflected, but dominated the spirit of the age. Rogers's "Pleasures of Memory" had achieved an almost unprecedented success, and Byron ranked him amongst living poets as only second to Scott. Godwin was still an oracle to be consulted with reverential awe. In 1815 Byron and Scott were at the zenith of their fame ; in that same year "The Excursion" was published, the cantos of "Childe Harold" were coming out, and Keats's Poems were issued in 1817. Shelley's "Alastor" and the "Revolt of Islam," the first of his poems to make any mark, were published in 1815 and 1817.

Rogers's house in St. James's Place had been, since 1803, a meeting-place for the most remarkable men of the day ; and during the first decades of the century Moore and Byron, Scott and Charles Lamb, Hazlitt, Campbell, Leigh Hunt, and Montgomery, to mention only some names amongst many, were guests at his table.

Wordsworth and Southey, upon their visits to London were at once drawn into the same circle—an elastic circle of men of letters whose very diverse claims to eminence



afforded all-sufficient introductions to a society where conventional distinctions were of minor importance.

It must not be forgotten that the appreciative recognition accorded to Coleridge was, though very considerable, by no means widespread. His published poems were few, and many, like "Christabel" itself, had been only shown in manuscript to those whose literary judgments carried weight.

His lectures at the Royal Institution under the auspices of Sir Humphrey Davy had been successful, and in 1811-12 all the cultivated world flocked to the series on Shakespeare and Milton before the Philosophical Society. Unequal and diffuse, but eloquent and brilliant, they were followed by a success which had a yet stronger element of popularity, when "Remorse," ten years before rejected and laid aside, was produced at Drury Lane and so warmly received as to yield substantial profits. The poems destined to immortalize his genius were, however (with the exception of those included in the early volume of "Lyrical Ballads"), not as yet given to the world.

It was after his removal to Highgate in 1816 that he revised and published "Christabel." It was already well known to most of the leading poets. It had been recited, quoted, and enthusiastically admired. He had confidently anticipated a corresponding recognition on the part of the reading public or at least of literary critics, and his deep disappointment at its reception was intensified by natural surprise. The "Edinburgh Review" in a crushing article described it "as the most notable piece of impertinence of which the press has lately been guilty"; and the "Quarterly" left it altogether unnoticed. Nor did the critics show more discernment with regard to his



publications in the prolific year of 1817. Blackwood wrote of the "wild ravings" of the "*Biographia Literaria*"; and the verse destined to take the highest place not only in poetic minds but in every volume of selected poetical masterpieces, was issued in the volume entitled "*Sybillene Leaves*" to be chiefly disparaged or ignored.

Yet no one could affirm that it was an age when poetry was at a discount. Poems, too numerous to mention, following one another in rapid succession, had failed to satisfy the omnivorous appetite of the reading public. Poets held the highest places in literature; recognition was not lacking, and Southey's "*Epics*" had already in 1813 raised him from among his contemporaries to the post of Poet Laureate.

Coleridge, with overstrained nerves, remorseful recollections, and physical infirmities, was manifestly unfit to meet either disapproval or contempt with indifference or courage. Wordsworth could set aside adverse criticism with undisturbed self-reliance, and a serene expectation of the ultimate reversal of its decrees; assured that the juster judgment of posterity could not fail to do homage to his greatness. But Wordsworth, in his inner and domestic circle, had secured a full acknowledgment of his philosophical, intellectual, and poetical supremacy. Coleridge had, it is true, devoted disciples, some constant friends, and many in whose estimation and regard he held the highest place; but he had cut himself adrift from those ties of kindred and affection that might have lightened the sense of failure and isolation.

Though his will had been too long inert to be able to resist temptation, it was at least capable of one

fortunate decision. He realized his own weakness, and himself erected a barrier to be a defence against its fatal encroachments, by voluntarily placing himself under the kind guardianship of the Gillmans at Highgate.

Here a natural desire revived to be once more in contact with his children, and in October, 1817, Miss Wordsworth's comment for once betrays an undercurrent of embittered feeling. "Derwent Coleridge is going to his father in London. I cannot see any good that can possibly arise from this, unless it forces his father to exert himself to put the boy forward, or forces him to confess openly that he cannot do anything; which will at least compel him to perceive that he and his children have had and have friends, ill as he thinks he has been used in the world. . . ." Longsuffering patience has its limits; yet the tone of censure might have been softened if she had been in the immediate presence of one so markedly, though deservedly, unfortunate.

He had theoretically no desire to loosen the ties of kinship, and was delighted to observe the admiring affection of both Hartley and Derwent for their sister. Though self-betrayed, he had still a right to be proud of his children. Hartley spent his first vacation with him at Calne, and soon after his arrival at Highgate he was enabled to take effectual measures to send Derwent to Cambridge. Through their father the boys became known to those of his friends who lived in London or were merely visitors to the Lakes, and many took an especial interest in them for his sake.

Crabb Robinson, who was in frequent intercourse with him during his later years, had already made acquaintance with his children at Keswick. He found

Derwent at Wordsworth's house fulfilling the promise of his childhood; pleasant, easy-tempered, and robust, "a hearty boy with a good natural expression. Sara has an expression of great sweetness. And Hartley Coleridge," he writes, "is one of the strangest boys I ever saw. He has the features of a foreign Jew, with starch and affected manners. He is a boy pedant, exceedingly formal, and, I should suppose, clever."

This unpleasing description is so far unlike those from other sources as to appear to be the result of hasty first impressions. But Hartley's eccentricities might have been easily mistaken for affectation and his shyness for pedantry.

It must also be remembered that a certain amount of what might be stigmatized as priggishness, was the not unusual consequence of the endeavours of conscientious parents and teachers to make use of every casual circumstance or natural object to impress some moral lesson, in the shape of warning or example, upon youthful minds. Though Charles Lamb had forsworn what he called Mrs. Trimmer's and Mrs. Barbauld's nonsense when choosing nursery books for Hartley, it was not in vain that they, with Mrs. Marcet, Miss Edgeworth, Mrs. Inchbald, and others, had inculcated the necessity of reasonable self-control and propriety of feeling and conduct. Impulsive little girls might still long for purple jars, but they had learnt to be ashamed of their natural predilections for useless playthings. Thomas Day, the author of "Sandford and Merton" had even gone so far as to drop hot sealing-wax on the hands of the children under his charge

in order more forcibly to impress lessons of fortitude ; and respectful manners, combined with an intelligent desire to acquire useful knowledge upon every possible occasion, were the necessary characteristics of well-educated children.

Even when taken by surprise their training stood them in good stead. When a careless servant at Strawberry Hill spilt some hot coffee over Macaulay's legs, though at five years old an outcry might have been allowable, he preserved a stoical attitude, merely politely replying when asked how he felt, "Thank you, Madam, the agony is abated ;" and the formality of expression, though doubtless inculcated and acquired, could not be justly termed self-conceit or affectation.

Hartley (always readily disposed to adapt himself to his audience), upon his introduction to his father's friend and admirer, probably over-acted his part. For, amongst his many other failings, an over-scrupulous and formal observance of accepted social codes could hardly in general have been laid to his charge. Indeed, though he had engaging ways, he had never found it easy to maintain a set standard of conduct and manners.

At Oxford his peculiarities did not find favour, but they were hardly suppressed, and during his first years there he led a somewhat retired life ; physically incapable of joining in games or athletics, making very few friends, and working at specific subjects with eager though irregular diligence.

In 1817 he spent some time with his father at Highgate, and there, again, met the friends of his childhood ; Charles and Mary Lamb, Hazlitt, and other literary persons, to whom a visit to Coleridge already

partook of the nature of a pilgrimage. In July, 1817, his father wrote: "Hartley has been with me for the last month. He is very much improved; and if I could see him more systematic in his studies and in the employment of his time, I should have little to complain of in him or to wish for. He is very desirous to visit the place of his infancy, poor fellow! And I am very desirous, if it were practicable, that he should be in the neighbourhood, as it were, of his uncles, so that there might be a probability of one or the other inviting him to spend a few weeks of his vacation at Ottery. His cousins (the sons of my brothers James and George) are very good and affectionate to him, and it is a great comfort to me to see the chasm of the first generation closing and healing up in the next."

Eventually Hartley passed some of this summer at Nether Stowey, under the roof of his father's old friend Thomas Poole, to whom this letter was addressed. Here he was brought into contact not only with young men but with girls, and with these latter especially he became very popular. The strange alternations of humour and melancholy, so strong a characteristic in after-life, and his distaste for active manly pursuits, had made him more or less of a solitary both at school and college; but his sensitive tenderness, his love of praise, and the unsatisfied longings of an exceptionally affectionate nature, rendered him peculiarly susceptible to what he himself terms "brief periods of dear delusion."

In these, throughout his life (strange as it may seem), fancy, rather than passion, played the leading part. He



had, happily, not as yet the deep sense of unworthiness prompting the lines—

To —

“I love thee—none may know how well  
And yet—I would not have thee love me ;  
To thy good heart 'twere very hell,  
To love me dear, and not approve me.”

This period of early manhood was more truly depicted in the beginning of the retrospective sonnet—

“Long time a child, and still a child, when years  
Had painted manhood on my cheek was I,  
For yet I lived like one not born to die ;  
A thriftless prodigal of smiles and tears,  
No hope I needed, and I knew no fears.”

Of his early girl companions he asked indeed little beyond what they were ready to bestow—a community of youth, a pleasant dallying with life's promises, an admiration gladly bestowed upon his oratorical gifts, an affectionate forbearance towards his personal failings, and a gentle sympathetic correspondence with his varying moods of which he was necessarily deprived in the stress and hurry of undergraduate life surrounding him at Oxford.

He did not, however, fail to awaken a strong and discerning interest in some young men's minds, and one of these, Chauncey Hare Townshend, who made his acquaintance when on a visit to Southey, gives a graphic description of his first meeting with him during the summer vacation of 1818.

Hartley, with extravagant, if fitful, ardour was reading for an examination, and so much absorbed in his work



that he did not even appear at the family dinner-table, but passed the whole day in the room set apart as his study, only interrupting his work to take some hasty meal at odd moments. Though living under the same roof, his uncle's guest was unaware of his presence in the house until he discovered that a figure he had only seen "flitting" about the garden in the fading daylight with a quick agitated motion, was the hitherto unknown inhabitant of Greta Hall—Hartley Coleridge.

It is a remarkable fact, hardly to be regarded as a coincidence, that those who describe Hartley's movements rarely speak of him as standing or sitting. Even in infancy his mother declares "he flutters his callow wings"; in his father's verse he is "singing and dancing to himself." Wordsworth notes "his breeze-like motion"; and Aubrey de Vere, upon meeting with him not many years before his death, bears striking testimony to the survival of this individual trait, strangely uniting the child to the man by a link not to be regarded as merely physical. "He could hardly be said to have walked," so de Vere writes in his "Recollections," "for he seemed with difficulty to keep his feet on the ground, as he wavered about near us with arms extended like wings. . . ." On another occasion he "fluctuated" about the room. "There seemed to be no gravitating principle in him. One might have thought he needed stones in his pocket to prevent his being blown away." And now once again we find a stranger noting the same peculiarity; the "flitting" figure of the young man in the indistinct twilight, amongst the trees and shrubs of the garden.

Upon closer acquaintance the guest received, and has

recorded, a clear impression of a personality as original, and almost as whimsical, as that of Robin Goodfellow or any other legendary gnome from fairyland ; though at times resuming the burden of humanity, and oppressed with an undue sense of its undercurrent of suffering and dissatisfaction. "Years have swept from my mind," Townshend writes, "the particulars of our various conversations, yet the general impression on my memory of eloquence and beauty will never pass away. . . . Politics nearly excepted, we ran over every subject of human thought and inquiry, Hartley throwing upon all the light, I might say splendour, of his own fine intelligence."

The description throughout breathes an enthusiastic appreciation, so great as to overcome a young man's natural reserve in giving it expression, and one sentence is especially noteworthy as delineating a side of Hartley's character afterwards somewhat obscured by his lapses from moral rectitude. "So far from betraying anything sickly in his moral texture, he was force itself both in thought and expression, though he had his moments of despondency."

One Sunday morning, on his road to church, after repeating to his companion, with his unflinching verbal memory, the greater part of Wordsworth's poem, "Resolution and Independence," he concluded his recital at the stanza—

" But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might  
Of joy in minds that can no further go,  
As high as we have mounted in delight  
In our dejection do we sink as low,  
To me that morning did it happen so ;

And fears and fancies thick upon me came ;  
Dim sadness—and blind thoughts I knew not, nor  
could name."

And after a marked silence, with an altered tone in his low, musical voice, he added—

" 'The fear that kills ;  
And hope that is unwilling to be fed.' "

"These have I known. I have even heard a voice—yes, not like a creation of the fancy, but an audible and sensuous voice foreboding evil to me."

The whole account of that Sunday morning, surviving in the memory of a chance acquaintance, faithfully represents the apparently incongruous elements in a nature at once introspective and transparent ; at one hour resigning itself to an overpowering sense of blank despondency and the next with humorous pleasantry and a singular mixture of self-pity and self-contempt setting it aside. Upon this occasion it was in vain that his friend endeavoured to combat what he regarded as a diseased imagination. In spite of his efforts Hartley remained silent and depressed. But natural and religious influences came to his assistance. The little church in St. John's Vale had its windows set wide open ; the summer air blew softly from the hills, the sunshine fell in a dancing, flickering light upon the stone floor and oak benches ; and Hartley's countenance resumed its usual expression of bright serenity. Nor was he merely contented with attendance at church ; after the service was ended he strayed into the Sunday-school and extemporizing, as we may imagine, a some-

what unauthorized set of examination questions, he urged and inspirited the little group of country scholars to display their frugal store of scriptural knowledge to the best advantage for the edification of their visitor. "This," he cried, with restored cheerfulness as he left the school,—“this is a capital cure for blue devils.”

His love for children and the easy friendliness which knew nothing of class distinctions, were throughout his life sources of pure unalloyed happiness; but, during this vacation, where, in the home of his childhood, student and family life were combined, they were less overshadowed than probably at any other period by dark presentiments or unavailing regrets. He was with those who loved and admired him and were hopeful of conquests and prizes yet to be won. His charming manners made amends for absence of mind and eccentric gestures, whilst, what his father had termed in boyhood his “flute-like voice,” and the brilliancy of his beautiful dark eyes, redeemed his face from insignificance and made him personally attractive, even to strangers, in spite of his short stature and irregular features.

Thus, less conscious than usual of defects and shortcomings, and with a spirit lightened and quickened by hope, he returned to Oxford to pass his final examination in October, 1818.

## CHAPTER X

### COLLEGE LIFE

Hartley's college life—His conversational powers—He is out of favour with those in authority—Fails to obtain the Newdigate—Consequences of his failure—Letter to Derwent—Obtains the Oriel Fellowship—His position as Fellow—His loss of the Fellowship—Two years in London—Literary efforts

THERE are not many incidents or recollections of any moment recorded in connection with Hartley's University course, with the exception of those disastrously affecting the whole tenor of his after-life. He had, as has been said, few college friends, but some were men of high intellectual and moral character. One of these, Robert Burton, was a winner of the prize for Latin verse, a double first-class man, and subsequently a Fellow of Exeter. Another, the Rev. Alexander Dyce, supplied some vivid remembrances incorporated in Derwent Coleridge's short Memoir of his brother. His acquaintance with Hartley began at Oxford soon after his first examination in the schools and continued until the time when he stood for the Oriel Fellowship.

"In accurate knowledge of Greek and Latin," Dyce writes, "he was inferior to many youths of his standing ; but he used to read sundry classics which are seldom



opened at the University; for instance, he had carefully gone through the whole of Aulus Gellius, and he would take great pleasure in talking to me about passages in that curious writer." What evidently made the most impression upon all who knew him were his amazing conversational powers, causing him to be socially much sought after. "He knew that he was expected to talk, and talking was his delight. Leaning his head on one shoulder, turning up his bright dark eyes, and swinging backwards and forwards in his chair, he would hold forth by the hour (for no one wished to interrupt him) on whatever subject might have been started—either of literature, politics, or religion, with an originality of thought, a force of illustration, and a facility and beauty of expression which I question if any man living, except his father, could have surpassed."

Nothing indeed could more clearly exemplify the close, and in some respects fatal, resemblance of Hartley to his father. It recalls the many corroborative testimonies from very diverse listeners as to Coleridge's eloquent improvisations. "Very great in monologue but with no idea of dialogue," so Madame de Staël affirmed. Crabb Robinson declared he kept him on the stretch of attention from three to twelve; and when Lamb "dined in Parnassus with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Rogers, and Tom Moore—half the poetry of England constellated and clustered in Gloster Place . . . Coleridge was in his finest vein of talk, and let 'em talk as evilly as they will of the envy of poets, I am sure not one there but was content to be nothing but a listener. The muses were dumb while Apollo lectured



on his and their fine art." Even Hazlitt confessed him to be "a great talker certainly if you let him start from no data and arrive at no conclusion." But Coleridge's declamations were frequently the outcome of serious premeditated thought. He had a regard for his reputation as well as for his subject, and delivered his discourse much as a celebrated extempore preacher might deliver a sermon, admitting of no arguments or refutation. Hartley, on the contrary, was a careless prodigal in his speech ; and like a spendthrift, whose small change slips out of his purse almost without his knowledge, he had fewer gold pieces for great occasions. He never invested his capital either of knowledge or intellect so as to get the best return ; and, unfortunately for his prospects, he had no regard for the world's fictitious standards and no disposition to obey the law of edification. His eloquent rhetoric, united to rashness in judgment and unpopular opinions, undoubtedly contributed to set him outside the pale of academic forbearance. His talk had none of "the freezing immunities of the pulpit," he was as ready to accept as to give, and in many societies his unwarranted assertions and revolutionary tenets might well have been received with the indulgence accorded to youth and immaturity, even if they had failed to attract or convince. Unluckily they were ill-chosen for the time and place. Together with much just and well-deserved censure for other serious faults and foibles, he gained a character for unreliability in word as well as in conduct, in a great degree to be attributed to his unmeasured fondness for oratorical display. Upon religion and politics his views were considered to be dangerously

unsound ; there was no strength of character nor marked classical abilities to cause his undisciplined behaviour to be condoned by those in authority, whilst his love of display caused him to seek admiration rather than approval, and threw him into society where his quaint humour won a cheap popularity.

He was well aware of his own deficiencies. Partly from an easy self-indulgence, partly as the result of a roving temperament, he had been inclined to undervalue the technicalities of learning, and was persuaded he had little chance of obtaining ordinary University distinctions. He was, however, the son of a poet, nurtured in a poetic atmosphere ; he had boldly embarked upon a literary career before his childish fingers could guide a pen, and he was conscious of poetic gifts awakening all his latent aspirations for some measure of success and public recognition. He considered himself to be cruelly handicapped by personal disadvantages for gaining eagerly desired applause ; to hold an audience spellbound and enthralled was, at the best, an evanescent triumph. To win the Newdigate prize for English verse was an overmastering desire, and before it all others paled. It would secure public appreciation, excite a personal interest he could hope to awaken in no other way, and at the same time satisfy a not unworthy ambition. Three successive years he tried for the coveted prize and failed to obtain it.

His ill-success had more calamitous and far-reaching consequences than could have been reasonably expected from any ordinary competitive failure. The first subject was the "Horses of Lysippus," and, though not inclined to regard his verses of first-rate excellence, he honestly

held himself to be fully capable of distancing his competitors. When the poem was rejected he was overwhelmed by a poignant and unprecedented passion of disappointment altogether disproportioned to the event. He had placed all his confidence, and rested all his hopes, upon the one prize he believed an otherwise unkind fate would be compelled in common justice to deliver into his hands, and the rejection plunged him into a gloom as dark as night and which no star of hope could lighten. "It was almost the only occasion in my life wherein I was keenly disappointed," so he wrote in one of his books; "for it was the only one upon which I felt any confident hopes." He honestly endeavoured to rejoice in a friend's success; "it would not do. It was bare sands with me the next day." It was not the mere loss of the prize, but the feeling or phantasy of an adverse destiny. "I was as one who discovers that his familiar to whom he has sold himself is a deceiver. I foresaw that all my aims and hopes would prove frustrate and abortive, and from that time I date my downward declension, my impotence of will and melancholy recklessness. It was the first time that I sought relief from wine, which, as usual in such cases, produced, not so much intoxication, as downright madness."

In a long letter to Derwent in May, 1821, when he had left Oxford and reaped the immediate penalty of his transgressions, he endeavours to investigate the causes of his lamentable decline from the upward path of hopeful endeavour, and reviews his shortcomings in a confession which, like those of many other persons, is obviously sincere though not necessarily true to fact.

It is chiefly remarkable for the conscious avowal of weakness and the impartiality of self-condemnation ; though he hardly appears to be aware that his difficulties and temptations are, to a great extent, incidental to all University life.

"With few habits but those of negligence, with principles honest indeed and charitable, but not ascetic, and little applied to particulars, with much vanity and much diffidence, a wish to conquer neutralized by a fear of offending, with wavering hopes, uncertain spirits, and peculiar manners, I was sent among men, mostly irregular and in some instances vicious. Left to myself to form my own course of studies, my own acquaintances, my own habits—to keep my own hours, and in a great measure to be master of my own time, few know how much I went through—how many shocks I received from within and without ; how many doubts, temptations, half-formed ill resolutions passed through my mind. I saw human nature in a new point of view, and in some measure learned to judge of mankind by a new standard. I ceased to look for virtues which I no longer hoped to find, and set perhaps a disproportionate value on those which most frequently occurred. The uncertainty of my own prospects cast a gloom on what was before me. I did not love to dwell on the future, and gradually became reconciled to present scenes which at first were painful to me."

To his wavering mind the downward path was only too easy, and doubtless he found many friends upon the road and caught at many fleeting pleasures by the way. There was not only the charm of good fellowship, but frequently a truer and higher enjoyment to be found in

the society of men, in many respects his superiors, whom his felicities of language or bursts of eloquence had taken by storm. They might deride his extravagant eccentricities, dissent from his opinions, and be aware of his weakness, but they could still entertain a tolerant kindness for one who would have been the first to confess his moral infirmity, in whose humour there was no sting and in whose judgments of others there was no bitterness.

He took his degree with credit, the examiners placing him in the second class. It was understood to be a compromise—some being desirous to accord him a first on account of the evidences of unusually brilliant ability, whilst others, in spite of his varied knowledge and talents, judged him to be only worthy of a fourth. The higher estimate of his acquirements was, however, unanswerably confirmed by a later verdict. He stood for the Oriel Fellowship and obtained it with high distinction. Though surprise might be expressed, no envious tongues could breathe disparagement, for it was well known the examiners were unanimously agreed as to his undoubted superiority over the other candidates.

Now indeed the clouds above his head broke in startling, dazzling light. The good news travelling to Rydal Mount and Greta Hall renewed the hopes of all who loved him. Wordsworth and Southey might justly experience a profound feeling of self-congratulatory satisfaction in seeing the result of their efforts on his behalf, whilst one weight, at least, was lifted from his mother's anxious mind ever, in her over-scrupulous care for her children, disposed to anticipate evil rather than good. To Sara and Derwent he had been from childhood an object of admiring devotion, even when perplexing



doubts had arisen as to his reasonableness or wisdom. He had now furnished them with legitimate cause for pride in his success. To his father at Highgate it was the solution of many difficulties. Hartley had earned an honourable independence. Many precious gifts had been bestowed upon him at his birth, and it was an unspeakable consolation to believe that he had not forfeited his birthright.

But, inexplicable as it may appear, his triumph was to Hartley himself more dispiriting than a defeat. His heart failed him in this signal hour of victory. "After the first flush of success," he writes, "I was seized with uneasy melancholy. . . . Indeed from the first moment that I thought of offering myself as candidate, I felt that I was not consulting my own happiness." He was persuaded that he owed his election to a vague appearance of talent rather than to "a hearty conviction of his eligibility." His honours weighed upon him with a sense of undesired responsibility, and at the Fellows' table he felt himself a stranger.

In his account of his failure for the Newdigate he sounds a prophetic note of the dominating vice destined to blight the fair promise of his childhood and lay waste a life where remarkable intellectual gifts might otherwise have been successfully cultivated, and the high aspirations of a dreamer not dissociated from the practical fulfilment of moral obligations. Even in seasons when hope revived, there was henceforth a tragic element of insecurity in all that concerned his circumstances and condition.

Many causes, doubtless, contributed to his downfall. From his earliest boyhood he had had an impatience



of restraint and authority, whether in matters of fact or opinion. He was ever at heart a rebel against lawful limitations and established rights. A losing cause was, irrespective of its justice, most certain to enlist his sympathies, whilst a fraternal feeling for the wrongdoer impelled him to throw in his lot with those most obnoxious to dons and dignitaries. He took pupils, in whom he not unnaturally failed to inspire respect, though he appears to have worked with conscientious energy for their advancement. His own account of this first year after obtaining his Fellowship shows an uneasy sense of being put upon his trial. He did not "like the state of a probationer, or submit as I ought to have done to a yoke of observances which I sincerely think very absurd, and which I hoped I had escaped by being made a Fellow. I know I felt I was subjected to a sort of espionage, and could feel no confidence in men who were watching me. . . . The natural effect of all this on my mind was a tendency to resistance; and I was not bold enough to fight, nor prudent enough to make peace. . . . The complex effect of all this discontent and imprudence was, of course, self-reproach, inconsistency, quickly broken resolutions, just enough caution to lose my reputation for frankness, increasing dread of my *consocii*, incapacity of proceeding in any fixed plan, and an extreme carelessness whenever the painful restraint was removed. You know the consequences."

They were indeed serious enough; yet, even if foreseen, would have been probably powerless to arrest him in his course. His misdoings were notorious, going before to judgment, such as to be severely condemned by those appointed to enforce college rules; and Hartley

had no idea of hiding his failings under a cloak of respectability. He had no arts by which to acquire or retain the good opinion even of those whom he most respected, and his luxuriant imagination, left to run wild, quickly concealed and overran the path of duty.

At the conclusion of the probationary year he was held (mainly on the grounds of intemperance) to have forfeited his Fellowship.

It was a terrible culminating reversal of any propitious auguries for his future. "The stroke," Derwent writes, "came upon his father with all the aggravations of surprise, as 'a peal of thunder out of the clear sky.' I was with him at the time, and have never seen any human being, before or since, so deeply afflicted." It roused Coleridge to action, and he went down to Oxford to expostulate with the Provost. It was in vain. Some palliations might be found and some incidents proved to be exaggerated. There still remained ample and justifiable reasons for a judgment his best friends could hardly consider to be unjust. Nor does Hartley himself appear to have resented it. He had lost his own good opinion and could not be surprised to find that others shared his views. Indeed, he might have had a better chance of reinstating himself if he had not been singularly lacking in the "tonic of a wholesome pride"; possessing in its stead a real taste for self-abasement and a remarkable incapacity for taking serious offence or feeling lasting resentment.

A sum of £300 was awarded to him as a voluntary compensation, and in May, 1821, he left Oxford behind, and with it any real hopes of retrieving his position.

After the misery of his condemnation, however, had

spent its first force Hartley experienced in himself a renewal of self-confidence. He was doubtless relieved at being released from obligations he was totally unable to fulfil, and from a position for which he was altogether unfitted. He went to London with the idea of maintaining himself by his pen, and the versatility of his literary abilities would have rendered the task comparatively easy had he not unhappily lacked any strong motive power to direct or govern his efforts. From a distance anxious faithful hearts still prayed and pitied and watched over him, clinging with pathetic insistence to any sign of reawakened energy or earnestness. At first he resided in Gray's Inn; afterwards the Basil Montagus, with their unfailing kindness, took him in; and later on he lived with some friends in the City, and set himself to obtain employment, putting aside poetry for awhile as less profitable, and writing, amongst other things, several articles for the "London Magazine." In 1822 he found a congenial subject for an article on the "Poetical Use of the Heathen Mythology." It was one, he observed, especially likely to interest his readers at a time when "the Gods and Goddesses of classic fame, with all the noblesse of Fauns and Satyrs, Dryads and Hamadryads, are beginning to occupy with limited sway their ancient places in poetry." Yet he discovers that "the immortal emigrants have acquired new manners and almost new faces in their exile," and allows himself to express some fugitive regrets that "the hot fantastic youth of the Grecian age is flown for ever. We are grown up to serious manhood and are wedded to reality." So Hartley thinks fit to write in a strain which if regarded as the result of individual experience is certainly out of place. "Truths which the

ancients sought after as precious jewels are to us household stuff. The moral being has gained a religion and the imagination has lost one."<sup>1</sup>

The whole article is chiefly remarkable, as the work of a young man, for its restrained and cultivated style, and some of its closing sentences are unconsciously indicative of his natural temperament. "It is a soothing dream (and who can prove it but a dream), that the emotions of our hearts, the imaginations that come we know not whence, the whispers that console or awaken, flow from a higher fountain than the dark well of our own individuality ; and yet the instinct of humanity would persuade us that they proceed from beings that partake of enough human frailty to afford it an understanding and experienced sympathy. True it is that these conceits will not bear reasoning from. Like glow-worms or fire-flies they should be looked at by no light but their own. . . . As articles of faith they cannot be commended, but yet they are beautiful fancies ; and if they were ever pernicious, they have now lost their venom, and may serve to show how much or how little the unaided intellect can effect for itself ; as sometimes the dim outline of the moon appears by day, to inform us how the night is preserved from darkness."

Beautiful fancies were ever to Hartley of more account than articles of faith, though in his prose he kept his excursive imagination within limits. His writings were appreciated, and his friends rejoiced at these evidences of an effort to use his talents to some advantage.

The article upon Mythology found its way to Gras-

<sup>1</sup> It is certainly curious to find Heine some years later clothing the same thoughts in similar language.

mere, and Dorothy Wordsworth wrote of it in the warmest terms to Crabb Robinson. "Pray read a paper in the 'London Magazine,' by H. Coleridge. It has pleased us very much. The style is wonderful for so young a man; so little of effort and no affectation."

During these years in London he also wrote poetry: some of his best sonnets and the fragments of "The Prometheus." Some scholars found defects both in conception and style, but his father read them with admiring interest; and it is undoubtedly true that Hartley's undeniable poetic gifts came to maturity early.

It was, however, certain that London could be no suitable place of abode for a young man with no profession, and no stated duties to act as barriers against the temptations to which he could oppose no strong inner citadel of resistance.

In 1823, under circumstances which will be treated of later on, he returned to the Lake country, the home of his childhood, in which most of his remaining years were to be spent.

In its solitary glens and hills, and amongst its simple peasantry, he was henceforth to find the truest, purest happiness still possible for one disinherited and bereft by his own act of life's best opportunities. "Misfortune," it has been said, "like water, espouses the form of the vase that contains it." To Hartley it brought no rancour and no bitterness. In spite of his moral infirmity, his respect for truth and goodness remained unshaken; he took what was yet left to him with a real sense of unworthiness and a humble, contented heart; and at least it could be truthfully asserted that he never lowered his ideals to accord with his practice.



## CHAPTER XI

### SARA IN GIRLHOOD

Sara Coleridge in her girlhood—Her beauty—Her attainments—Literary women—Charles Lamb on Sara—Visit to Highgate—Henry Nelson Coleridge—His engagement to his cousin—Love-letters—Marriage postponed

IN this same winter of 1822-23, Mrs. Coleridge went with Sara on a visit to Highgate. It was long since Coleridge had seen his daughter, and she can hardly have failed to awaken his deepest affection and arouse latent sentiments of parental pride.

Even strangers who saw her for the first time were struck by the marked individuality of her beauty, upon which the inward grace of her nature was so visibly impressed. "Her great characteristic," Aubrey de Vere writes, "was the radiant spirituality of her intellectual and imaginative being. This it was that looked forth from her countenance. When Henry Taylor saw Sara Coleridge first as she entered Southey's study at Keswick, she seemed to him, as he told me, a form of compacted light, not of flesh and blood, so radiant was her hair, so slender her form, so buoyant her step, and heaven-like her eyes."

This was in 1823, and Taylor took away such clear recollections of the loveliness of her girlhood as to be



able to set them down in detail after a lapse of fifty years. "I suppose," he wrote to her daughter, "she was then about twenty years of age. I saw but little of her, for I think she was occupied in translating some mediæval book from the Latin, and she was seen only at meals or for a very short time in the evenings; and as she was almost invariably silent I knew nothing of her mind till I renewed my acquaintance with her many years afterwards. But I have always been glad that I did see her in her girlhood, because I then saw her beauty untouched by time, and it was a beauty which could not but remain in one's memory for life, and which is now distinctly before me as I write. The features were perfectly shaped and almost minutely delicate, and the complexion delicate also but not wanting in colour, and the general effect was that of gentleness, indeed I may say of composure even to stillness. Her eyes were large and they had the sort of serene lustre which I remember in her father's"—thus unconsciously corroborating the saying that "her father had looked down into her eyes and left in them the light of his own."

The want of youthful animation may have been partly the result of the imaginary terrors of her childhood, and partly of the clouds of estrangement and trouble overshadowing a home deprived of the happy security a child insensibly experiences in the atmosphere of united parental love and care. Nevertheless, the freedom and beneficent influences of country life had braced her nerves and fortified her constitution. She had lost the wax-like delicacy of the hot-house flower, and her fragility was rather that of the harebell which, firmly

rooted in its rocky crevice, sways lightly upon its slender stalk and is better fitted than stronger plants to breast the storm.

In 1819 Ticknor had found her beautiful and full of genius, and averred that Southey had given her an education "enabling her, in spite of an alarming degree of modesty, to speak of Virgil, Cervantes, and Dante as familiar acquaintances."

Now she was to become known, not only in her immediate circle and to the visitors to the Lakes, but to the hitherto strange world of London literary society, or at least to those of its members who called themselves her father's friends. It was not a set from which women were excluded. The Lambs were, of course, generally together, and with a tender sympathy for his brotherly devotion the hearts of all who loved him went out to his afflicted sister. Many of them had the highest opinion of her abilities; Landor went so far as to assert that, with the exception of the "Bride of Lammermoor," one of her tales was the most beautiful ever written in prose. Lamb himself professed an aversion, which probably never took a practical shape, for all learned ladies, and called Mrs. Inchbald the only endurable clever woman he had ever known, the rest were impudent, forward, unfeminine, unhealthy; and Miss Mitford, with her "benevolent, intelligent smile," appeared to please him most, because, in society, she had "no words." His contemporaries did not share his opinion. Rogers constantly invited eminent women to his house, without fear of their presence imperilling its reputation for agreeableness; and if men preponderated, it might be accounted for by the

undeniable fact that many of them were, from a literary point of view, especially unfortunate in their wives.

Sara, as her father's daughter, had an acknowledged claim to be well received, and the charm of her presence at once aroused more than ordinary feelings of kindly interest. She came amongst his friends surveying her new surroundings with quick intelligence but modest composure ; and could not be swept out of the calm current of her life by the exciting novelty of the company in which she found herself, where Irving, like a fierce, devouring fire, extinguished the lighter flame of Lamb's wit, and where Hazlitt's eyes "flashed epigrams." Nor was she always silent when Coleridge's incomparable eloquence struck his audience dumb with reverential awe. To Lamb's great delight she ventured to interrupt her father's monologue with an insistent though gentle comment : "But my Uncle" (Southey) "does not think so." Lamb indeed regarded her with appreciative affection. "Yes, I have seen Miss Coleridge," he writes ; "and wish I had just such a—daughter. God love her—to think that she should have to toil thro' five octavos of that cursed (I forget I write to a Quaker) Abbeypony History, and then abridge them to 3, and all for £113. At her years, to be doing stupid Jesuits' Latin into English, when she should be reading or writing Romances. Heaven send her Uncle do not breed her up a Quarterly Reviewer." And a little later, when she left London, he writes : "The Coleridges have taken flight, to my regret. With Sara's own-made acquisitions, her unaffectedness and no pretensions are beautiful. You might pass an age with her without suspecting that she knew anything but her mother

tongue. I don't mean any reflection on Mrs. Coleridge here. I had better have said her vernacular idiom. Poor C., I wish he had a home to receive his daughter in. But he is but a stranger or visitor in this world."

Coleridge might not have a home, but he was no longer a forlorn and houseless pilgrim of no fixed state. The Gillmans were at once his friends and guardians; and his wife, though in the anomalous position of a casual visitor, could give a cheerful account of him to Wordsworth.

Their visit must have thrown many new lights upon Sara's childish recollections of her father, and brought her into contact with many things and persons as yet undreamt of. It did more than this. Henceforth, wherever she might dwell, there was a new heaven above her head, a new earth beneath her feet.

Her cousin Henry Nelson Coleridge, the fifth son of Colonel James Coleridge, of Heath's Court, Ottery St. Mary, Devon, was at this time in London, practising as a Chancery barrister, and living in chambers at Lincoln's Inn. Educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, he won the Browne medal for Greek and Latin Odes, and became a Fellow of his college. Nor were his studies merely academic and classical. He was well versed in the wide range of English literature, and shared the somewhat too exclusive admiration many of his family bestowed upon the poets of the Lakes. At Cambridge he numbered amongst his intimate friends Charles Austin, Charles and Hyde Villiers, the poet Praed, Moultrie (whose "Dream of Life" is descriptive of this time) and Macaulay, born in the same year as himself. Macaulay speaks of a vehement and protracted

argument upon the merits of Wordsworth's poetry being carried on by his undergraduate friends; the Coleridges—Henry and Derwent—being loud in its praises, whilst in the end he himself, the single dissentient, proved to be the only one of the party who had got through the Prelude.

Probably Henry Coleridge supplied this lack of knowledge later on, for upon taking up his abode in London he found an opportunity to cultivate acquaintances who brought him more and more into touch with the literature and the literary men of his day.

For years he sat as an ardent young disciple at Coleridge's feet; and but for him Coleridge's "Table Talk" would never have been given to the world. It does not indeed contain many of his mystic utterances, but rather "those islets of the blest and the intelligible" Carlyle hailed as occurring too rarely in the midst of the "illimitable seas." Yet it could have only been recorded by one who was an entirely unselfconscious and attentive listener, with the rare power of reproducing another's thoughts without any reserves or additions of his own—an editorial duty far more difficult to accomplish satisfactorily when it is a question not of written, but of spoken words. It was in 1822 that he first made his way to Highgate, and there met his aunt and cousin.

Sara's beauty was at this time so remarkable that once, upon her entering a theatre, the audience, as she went to her place, stood up simultaneously to see her pass; and no young man with an unpreoccupied heart, least of all one of her own race, full of poetic fervour and romance, could fail to fall in love with her. Brilliant, versatile, social, spirited, sure of his ground, with a happy



immunity from doubts and cares, Henry Coleridge seemed qualified to supply precisely the qualities his cousin lacked ; and Sara, to whom love and marriage were as serious and sacred as life and death, would have found it impossible in her transparent truthfulness to frame a denial her heart could not confirm, even if she had anticipated the delayed sanction of those who claimed a parental right to forbid the marriage. The chief obstacles in their eyes were instability of health and uncertain worldly prospects. Coleridge himself had an objection to marriages between first cousins, as recorded in the "Table Talk," but the Church, he said, "has decided otherwise on the authority of Augustine, and that seems enough upon such a point."

St. Augustine was not, however, consulted, and circumstances combined to make a long engagement inevitable. To the lovers constancy was as much an instinct as a virtue. Love might be a dream, but it was one from which there was no awakening. Hartley had formed a perfectly true conception of his sister's character when he wrote :—

"She was a maid  
Not easily beguiled by loving words  
Nor apt to love ; but when she loved, the fate  
Of her affections was a stern religion  
Admitting nought less holy than itself."

And during the seven years that were to elapse before her marriage with Henry Coleridge, though there were trials and vicissitudes, there were none that could affect their confidence and faith in one another.

The publication of love-letters has been justly depre-



cated as disclosing the inner sanctities of love and passion to the public gaze, and especially as the revelation of tempestuous emotions which those who experienced them would be the last to reveal to any but the one to whom they were due.

The desire of many, both for themselves and others, is fitly expressed in Donne's well-known lines :—

“ So let us melt and make no noise,  
No tear-floods nor sigh-tempests move ;  
'Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.”

In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, however, impassioned language was by no means the ordinary vehicle of courtship. Novels, to a certain extent, represent the manners and customs of the day, and the modest discretion with which Sir Walter Scott's heroes make love, in the midst of the most stirring events and under the most romantic circumstances, is hardly exceeded by the self-possessed propriety of Miss Austen's drawing-room lovers. It was not until some twenty years later that the Brontës' power and genius illuminated the heights and depths of passion with no restraints of language and no conventional reserves.

We need not therefore be surprised to find that Henry Coleridge, brought up as to principles and manners in a strict school of rigid orthodoxy, expressed the ardour and strength of his attachment to his beautiful cousin in terms rendering his letters models for all young lovers and quite suitable to be read aloud at the family breakfast-table.

“ Your virtues,” he writes to his betrothed in 1827,

"never shone so brightly in my eyes as they do now, and it is a spring of deep and sacred joy in my heart to think that, however weak and wavering my steps may be in the ways of religion, you are already a firm traveller in them and indeed a young saint upon earth. The trials to which our engagement has exposed you have been fatiguing and painful; but you have borne them all, not only without impatience or murmuring but with holy cheerfulness and energetic resignation, than which no two states of the heart are more difficult to man or more acceptable to God.

"I made a true remark to you once, which I feel every day justified by our own correspondence, that spiritual things differ from mere things of sense in this amongst other points, that sensual objects, capacities and enjoyments are all naturally bounded, short and fugitive, whilst pure love and pure intellectual communion are essentially without limits, and that to the purehearted a boundless ascent towards identity of moral being lies open, and that every day fresh depths of love and thought might open to the tender and assiduous sympathies of two adoring persons. I always loved you as much as my heart could feel at the time: but my respect, my veneration, for you had gone on increasing as I knew you more intimately. I hope I shall always have the sense to submit myself to your guiding influence in all cases of moral election. The more closely I imitate your habits, thoughts and actions, the better and happier man I shall become."

Sara shared his high ideals, and these "two adoring persons" had nothing to fear from any disillusioning effects of closer and less interrupted intercourse.

If Sara could never have altogether subordinated her judgment to her affections, the latter were not upon that account less deep and strong. Her cousin was more precipitate, but neither had natures that could "lightly turn to thoughts of love." During this time of expectation and uncertainty her composure gradually acquired a more settled gravity ; yet though the foreground might be overshadowed she could look beyond it. She herself speaks of the vision of life being often broken and obscured by fear and anxiety, but with the Sun of Hope burning in its centre. Naturally sensitive and sympathetic, she had not only the continual absence from her lover to weigh down her spirits, but pressing and disquieting thoughts, fluctuating hopes and fears, in which the latter preponderated, not to be dissociated from her ever-constant and inalienable affection for her brother Hartley.

## CHAPTER XII

### HARTLEY AS SCHOOLMASTER

Hartley leaves London—Coleridge's letter to Mr. Gillman—Letter from Hartley to his father—Return to Ambleside—Position as schoolmaster—Teaching at Sedbergh—Return to the Lakes—Self-appreciation

WHEN it had become clear that Hartley could not hope to gain an independence by his pen, and no other means of livelihood was open to him in London, the harassing difficulties which beset every turning-point in his life, once again unfortunately forced themselves upon the notice of those connected with him. Kindness and goodwill were not wanting. Many persons were anxious to befriend him for his father's sake and his own. But to endeavour to supply his needs was too often as useless as to pour a fresh stream of water into a leaking pitcher. Though he was no mendicant for other men's favour, and would have readily confessed their bounty might be wasted, he had no force of will to help himself, and any attempt to come to his assistance was weighted by heavy misgivings.

Coleridge, who could best estimate the tremendous power of Hartley's hereditary temptations, was pierced to the heart by the utter frustration of his former

fluctuating, and yet at times sanguine anticipations. After the loss of the Oriel Fellowship he wrote to Mr. Gillman : "Words I know are not wanted between you and me. But there are occasions so awful, there may be instances and manifestations so affecting, and drawing up with them so long a train from behind, so many folds of recollection, as they come onward on one's mind, that it seems but a mere act of justice to oneself, a debt we owe to the dignity of our moral nature, to give them some record—a relief which the spirit of man asks and demands to contemplate in some outward symbol of what it is inwardly solemnizing. I am still too much under the cloud of past misgivings, too much of the stun and stupor from the recent peals and thundercrash still remains, to permit me to anticipate other than by wishes and prayers what the effect of your unweariable kindness may be on poor Hartley's mind and conduct. I pray fervently, and I feel a cheerful trust that I do not pray in vain, that on my own mind and spring of action it will be proved not to have been wasted."

This peace of mind was, however, clearly to be attained irrespective of Hartley, and however healing and consolatory, it could pour no balm into the wounds he had made. Nor was it merely a question of feeling ; some action must be taken, and in this strait the only possibility suggested was that Hartley, who had had some experience as a tutor at Oxford, should again devote himself to teaching. His father had intended upon several occasions to adopt some such career himself, and he appears to have been incapable of perceiving how especially unsuited it was to Hartley's



character and antecedents. Still it was clear that a desultory life in the midst of a great city was full of temptations. His only chance was to obtain some definite work; it was therefore proposed, by those to whose wishes he felt bound to accede, that he should take the place of his old tutor, Mr. Dawes, who was resigning the mastership of the school at Ambleside. It is certainly strange that any one should have considered him to be fitted for so responsible a post. Upon this subject he himself had no illusions, and in a remarkable and characteristic letter to his father, he put his own conceptions of the state of the case before him.

“MY DEAR FATHER,—You have probably, ere this, received Robert’s letter, acquainting you that I am well in bodily health. I hope I may add that I am in a sane state of mind. For what is past, it is irremediable, and I know you too well to imagine that mere expressions of contrition, however sincere on my part, could afford you that consolation which can only be derived from a rational hope with regard to the future. You must be aware that the pain arising from the contemplation of a life mis-spent is often the cause of continuance in mis-doing even after the temptations which once misled have lost their power, and when the sophisms which have long deluded appear in their true deformity. Without in the least attempting to palliate conduct which admits of no palliation, I will simply declare to you, that for a long time, ever since my return to Mr. Montagu’s, I had been oppressed with an inward sinking, a despondency, which perhaps the more impaired my voluntary powers as it did not

affect my health. I was, in short, afflicted with a sense of incapability—a dread of looking at my own cure. The more my faults became obvious to those interested in me, the more I was possessed with that helpless consciousness of them which conduces to anything rather than amendment." This letter is undated, but it appears to have been written when the scheme of taking up the work of a schoolmaster was under consideration, for he adds reasons rendering such a step not only undesirable but absolutely futile. And in this instance at least he was wiser than his rulers. He speaks of the "physical incapability of exerting the necessary authority and preserving the necessary distance among a set of boys, in whose number there must needs be found high spirits and intractable natures. Boys of fifteen are harder to govern than men of twenty, and yet I can sincerely say I did my utmost at Oxford to perform the duties of a tutor, and I did it in vain. . . . In regard to my future plans, I shall not decide till I hear from you. It is my wish to make another trial of my talents in London. I know I can make more than a livelihood, and I have hopes—more than hopes—of my own steady perseverance in the right path ; but I will not be obstinate. Only let me say,—that, what with my past failures, what with the unavoidable weakness of nerves, and defect of that sort of sternness which is a necessary supplement to kindness in a pedagogue, I think schooling, of all things possible, the least eligible."

His powers of resistance were, however, weakened ; and a consciousness of the pain he had inflicted upon those nearest to him prompted a surrender. He

reluctantly took up the work at Ambleside, and for four weary years or more he took pupils, latterly in conjunction with a Mr. § Suart, a schoolmaster, in whose house he lodged, and by whom, after a while, he was engaged as classical assistant. They were in all probability the saddest years of his life.

For a time he attempted to take a cheerful view of his position. He dreaded bringing a fresh access of disappointment upon those responsible for the profession he had adopted and who were now watching his progress with anxious eyes. With a conscientious endeavour to afford them encouragement, he enumerates his causes for thankfulness in letters to Derwent. They are like correct accounts presented by a man who is well aware he has no money in the bank. "I have found more kindness, both here and elsewhere, than I have earned," he writes. "I have been delivered—providentially delivered—when I was hopeless of delivering myself, and what is almost equal to all,—I cannot find that either my cares or my follies have materially diminished my bodily or intellectual vigour. I receive kind and cheerful letters from father and mother and dear Sara. I am in no immediate pecuniary embarrassment, and need not fear for my future independence. All these are claims upon my gratitude. They do make me thankful and they ought to make me cheerful—if the word 'ought' and 'cheerful' have indeed any connection. Why should I trouble you with my complaints—my blighted hopes, the premature winter of the soul! . . ." And in a second letter: "I am not now happy but I am at ease ;—I am content and I am cheerful. I have no hopes and not many

wishes; and I have a strength within me, which is the more secure because I have learned not to confide in it."

And yet one cannot, but feel that "the winter of the soul" has frozen the springs of hope and gladness at their source.

Dorothy Wordsworth, like his parents, was ready to hope for the best, and she wrote: "As to poor Hartley, he sticks to his school-hours, is liked by his scholars, and is still 'Hartley' among them; even (out of school) the bigger ones address him as Hartley. This will give you a notion of the discipline exercised by him."

After a time a more pitiful picture is disclosed of his useless struggles to maintain an ascendancy—a leader without adherents facing the insurgents with a sinking heart, whilst the boys, probably amused at the unaccountable terror he could not conceal, threw their darts with careless cruelty, and the wounds of the lost battle bled afresh in the watches of "the dead unhappy night." Oppressed and disheartened by his powerlessness to resist the petty and yet intolerable persecutions of insubordinate pupils, miserable recollections of past failures forbidding any prospective security from even less irrevocable disasters, it is no wonder that his prognostications were fulfilled and he found "schooling of all things possible, least eligible." In a letter to his mother in 1831, he writes:—

"Even while I had the school, and your letters were, for the most part, full of encouragement, I had a presentiment that it would never do, and therefore your commendations seemed like reproaches put out to interest. . . . Every hour I spent with my pupils was

passed in a state more nearly related to fear than anything else. How then could I endure to be among unruly boys from seven in the morning till eight or nine at night, to be responsible for actions which I could no more control than I could move a pyramid. Strange it may be, but I have an instinctive horror of big boys,—perhaps derived from the persecution I suffered from them when I was a little one. When I am at all unwell, which I thank Heaven is much seldomer than I have deserved, they are always at me in my dreams,—hooting, pelting, spitting at me, stopping my ways, setting all sorts of hideous scornful faces at me, oppressing me with indescribable horrors to which waking life has no parallel." And he very truly adds : "It may often be a man's duty to persevere in a profession to which he feels a strong disinclination ; but no man ought to enter into a way of life for which he is conscious of an insurmountable incapability."

This incapacity was manifest to others besides himself ; one after another his scholars were removed, and the unfortunate venture came to an end.

It seems incomprehensible that he should again, for any conceivable reason, have taken up work in a boys' school, but in 1837 he assisted his friend, the Rev. Isaac Green, in the school at Sedbergh, and was so far successful as to be selected to take the place of the head master for a term during the following year.

The attempt was made under more favourable auspices. He was not responsible for the general conduct of the school nor for the discipline ; the boys were older and more intelligent, he gave lessons in the higher classics, and his teaching is said to have been



very clear, interesting, impressive, and much appreciated by his pupils ; one of whom after his death, in recording his impressions of those school-days, speaks of "such kindness and friendship as he cannot hope to find again." He describes Hartley as being dressed in black, his hair just touched with grey, falling in thick waves, and with "a sort of autumnal brightness and ripeness about him." He never once used a dictionary, and his readiness in translation amazed the boys. His peculiarities delighted them and were never made subjects for rude derision. Indeed some of them were calculated to gratify schoolboy tastes as tending to be subversive of rigid discipline. He seldom came to school before eleven in the morning, and was generally an hour late in the afternoon. Whilst waiting for a lesson he read the newspaper, and seldom occupied the master's desk, but would sit amongst the boys on one of the school benches, sometimes taking a turn about the room to relieve the tedium of study. Yet his former pupil adds the remarkable testimony, that, though he was kinder and more familiar than was the general custom of masters, no one ever took the slightest liberty with him. "He gave most attention to our themes ; out of those sent in he selected two or three, which he then read aloud and criticized ; and once, when they happened to agree, remarked there was always a coincidence of thought amongst great men. Out of school he never mixed with the boys, but was sometimes seen, to their astonishment, running along the fields with his arms outstretched and talking to himself."

At Sedbergh he therefore felt himself more in his proper sphere than at Ambleside ; and he had also one favourite

scholar, who ought to have been a girl, a little fair-haired boy who appealed to the reverential love he felt for the weakness and innocence of childhood. He was the only boy, as he declared, whom he had ever loved ; and he found him a consolatory companion. He was also fortunately free from the irritability of temper possibly of all things most destructive to a teacher's influence ; and had an easy indulgence for boyish pranks when free from any admixture of spite or cruelty.

On the occasion of the deprivation of a holiday at Sedbergh, for instance, indignation ran high ; and upon going to his class Hartley found disaffection had been forcibly expressed. The malcontents had filled the whole room with boughs of trees, arches of greenery, fantastic erections of every kind, and, upon these, copy-books, exercises, school-books, all the apparatus of learning, were suspended ; too high above his head, as they fondly hoped, for him to recover their spoils. Hartley, undismayed, mounted a chair, laughing as he knocked the burdens from the branches, and, opening the books and exercises, let forth a stream of jibes and jests upon the unripe fruits of Knowledge plucked from the tree above his desk.

After leaving Sedbergh he wrote to his friend, the head master, that it was "no small comfort to be assured that my vicarious ministration in the school is not unpleasantly remembered by the boys" ; but he was evidently thankful that such an episode might be relegated to the past.

It was one of the very few occasions upon which he quitted the shores of the Lakes and the hill-sides where he had dreamed and wandered when a boy. At least he was

now free—free from responsibilities to which he had been unequal, free from the restraints of an undesired position and uncongenial surroundings.

The high hopes attending upon childhood and youth had for ever fled, the past was a record of wasted powers and lost opportunities, and yet (strange as it may seem) he was not constantly unhappy. Seasons there were no doubt of dismal despondency, regrets piercing if transitory, but though much was for ever lost to him there were compensations.

After the four or five years at Ambleside he went to Grasmere, taking up his abode first at the "Red Lion" (then a little rustic inn), later on removing to Fleming's Farm, where Mrs. Fleming, a widow, soon learnt to care for him as for a favourite though erring son; his last abode being Nab Cottage, on the edge of Rydal Water, where he died.

Such are the few landmarks in the brief chronicle of his uneventful existence; his residence at Grasmere being also broken in 1832-33 by his domestication for a short time at Leeds with Mr. Bingley, a publisher, who undertook the publication of some of his prose works and poems.

The restraints of a town were distasteful. They were powerless to control his weakness; and he thankfully returned to his vagabond life in the familiar places amongst those who knew and loved him.

He describes his condition in the lines :—

"Too true it is that knowing now my state,  
I weakly mourn the sin I ought to hate,  
Nor love the law I fain would still obey."



NAIF COTTAGE





In the same sonnet he acknowledges he is "nothing loth to deem himself an outlaw."

Before entering upon the more detailed record of these years, an endeavour must at least be made to reconcile statements apparently so incompatible and yet so clearly and voluntarily sincere; searching not only into hidden springs of action but into the deeper mysteries of our own being, and those psychological problems that can alone give anything like a true interpretation to the otherwise unaccountable disruption between theory and practice so markedly exemplified in Hartley Coleridge's life and character.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CAUSES OF FAILURE

Hartley's moral incapacity—Charles Lamb on intemperance—Testimony of fiction to the habits of the day—Hartley's sense of unworthiness—Derwent Coleridge's Memoir—Coleridge's fears for Hartley—Remorse and penitence—Hartley's survey of his own character—Carpenter upon hereditary tendencies and moral responsibility

UPON various occasions James Spedding notes the result of careful observations he had made upon Hartley Coleridge's life and character—the observations not only of a fellow-inhabitant of the Lake district but of one whose judgment was free and unbiassed by personal considerations. He had "a mind," Sir James Stephen declares, "like the trade-wind regions of the Atlantic, always serene, always in motion, always pleasant—not passionless, but never agitated by passion—a most clear-sighted and equitable judge of men and things—wanting only strong impulses to become a great man." And it was Spedding who wrote: "The error of his (Hartley Coleridge's) life sprang, I suppose, from moral incapacity of some kind." That moral incapacity had its root in antecedents, predispositions, and circumstances so unpropitious as to silence words of unqualified condemnation and arrest the sword of justice upon its course.

The lightest extenuating plea to be taken into consideration when sitting in judgment upon his youthful irregularities, is furnished by the acknowledged fact that intemperance was then so frequent as hardly to awaken more than disapprobation, or elicit even from high-minded people more than a passing censure. And it is to be feared that Hartley's lapses must have been especially flagrant and public to have brought upon him so serious a loss as that of the Oriel Fellowship.

Charles Lamb, in writing of himself, touches upon the subject in significant language. "My habits are changing, I think, i.e. from drunk to sober. Whether I shall be happier or not remains to be proved. I shall certainly be more so in the mornings ;" but he fears he may regret "the glorious, care-drowning night that heals all our wrongs, pours oil into our mortifications, changes the scene from indifferent and flat to bright and brilliant. . . . Is life with such limitations worth living ?"

The question whether asked in jest or earnest is representative of much dividing those times from our own. How many names of men, unblameworthy in other respects, might not be cited to prove the prevalence of an undue use of wine and drugs ?

When the especially virtuous and sober-minded Crabbe was ordered opiates, he increased the dose until it absorbed and stimulated his imagination ; it introduced him to what has been called the "dream scenery" of the opium-eater, the vast expansions of time and space, and inspired some stanzas of his poem "Sir Eustace Grey," making it as unlike as could well be imagined to his other works. Yet the common-sense

respectability of the Poet-Rector of Trowbridge so much appealed to Miss Austen, that she declared he was the only man she would wish to marry; and he was certainly not a person to give way wilfully to culpable excesses.

Contemporaneous fiction provides examples of manners, and, if we are to suppose that her heroine represents her feelings, Miss Austen herself must have taken a tolerant view of a vice so naturally repugnant to her delicate moral sense. When Emma on her drive home from a dinner-party discovers Mr. Elton, the Rector, has taken too much of Mr. Weston's good wine, she is apparently not surprised at his condition. She only fears "he will want to be talking nonsense"; and when he fulfils her expectations by making love, she is consoled by the reflection that "half this folly must be drunkenness."

To take another clerical instance from Miss Brontë's "Shirley"—when Malone, the Irish curate, who has been making too free with the punch, is unexpectedly brought face to face with his Rector the following short dialogue ensues :—

"What is the matter with Malone?" Mr. Helstone asks. "His eyes seem starting out of his head."

"He has been eating a mutton chop."

"Indeed! Peter Augustus, be on your guard. Eat no more mutton chops to-night. You are left here in command of the premises: an honourable post."

And as he leaves the house he asks in a low voice if the mutton chops are locked up so that Peter Augustus cannot get at them.

It is fortunately impossible to conceive a Rector of the

present day treating any such delinquencies in the like imperturbable spirit.

But though the habits and standards of the time may extenuate Hartley's first falls, in company where such lapses were only too frequent, he would have been the last to adduce them as in any way condoning the subsequent waste and ruin of his life, to which he refers in one of his sonnets.

"For I have lost the race I never ran ;  
A rathe December blights my lagging May :  
And still I am a child, tho' I be old,  
Time is my debtor for my years untold."

A genuine sense of unworthiness forbids excuses, and the love and pity of his friends might have seemed to be his only and somewhat ineffective defence, had it not been for the hereditary tendencies and infirmities constituting the strongest factors in his case.

As a son Derwent may have found it difficult to dwell upon this side of the question, though in his Memoir the darker elements in Hartley's character are treated, as was to have been expected, with tender forbearance. As he truly says, "There are mysteries in our moral nature upon which we can only pause and doubt ;" and in speaking of the anomalies of Hartley's outward life, he asserts that he was notwithstanding "an awakener of holy thought and pregnant affections and they continue, in his degree, a living power for good. I would show what I believe to be most true, that the deeper issues of his soul sent forth sweet waters, which flowed on to the end strangely mingled with the bitter." And then he refers to his temperament



with its extraordinary alternations, not only from melancholy to humour, but from the depth of gloom to the most extravagant hilarity, and after quoting the line—

“Great wit to madness sure is near allied,”

he adds, in somewhat doubtful phrase, that in Hartley “it cannot, perhaps, be said to have overstepped the confines of sanity (indeed between the extremes there lay an interspace of healthy cheerfulness and boyish vigour), and yet, under all the circumstances, it may well account for and palliate, if not wholly excuse, much of what followed—the sorrow and regret of his after-life.”

The argument thus put forward with almost over-anxious sincerity—the keynote of the whole Memoir—seems altogether inadequate, and to a certain extent misleading. Judged by all ordinary standards, Hartley showed no disposition whatever to overstep the confines of sanity; yet it may well be conceded that an organism so strangely constituted can hardly be subjected to the usual criterions.

The legacy, not merely of ill-fortune but of infirmity, he might unwillingly bequeath, had weighed heavily both in anticipation and in retrospect upon Coleridge's own mind, forbidding any expressions of harsh condemnation or stern reproof when the shortcomings of his first-born were brought home to him. For instance, after the loss of the Fellowship he wrote that Hartley's sin was “the sin of his nature, and this has been fostered by the culpable indulgence or at least non-interference on my part.”

His thoughts revert to the days when Hartley's innocent childish fancies, as he danced and sang to himself, awakened wondering smiles as yet untinged with melancholy. "Can anything be more dreadful," he said upon one occasion, "than the thought that an innocent child has inherited from you a disease or a weakness, the penalty in yourself of sin or want of caution?"

He had never feared for Derwent or little Sara, but he had always been afraid for Hartley. Yet the two younger children might have seemed to be more proper subjects for anxiety. It was not until a few months after Hartley's birth that his father took between sixty and seventy drops of laudanum to relieve neuralgic pains; in 1801 he was again affirming that bodily and mental distresses necessitated the use of brandy and opium, and from that time onward habits were formed from which he had no power or will to deliver himself.

In Hartley's case, however, it would seem to have been a question not so much of inherited vice as of inherited weakness. His temptation was to the intemperate use of stimulants, not to the slavery of drugs. In spite of the strongly accentuated traits of likeness between himself and his father, in many respects they differed so widely that in some phases of mind and under certain circumstances the likeness was almost obliterated, and Coleridge in his happiest hours knew nothing of Hartley's irresponsible gaiety and absence of self-consciousness.

Whilst Hartley flitted across the scene, disappearing and reappearing in various parts: the child, the friend, the penitent, the prodigal—like a wandering minstrel welcomed at every door but never finding an abiding

place—Coleridge, at last enabled to curb and regulate his more calamitous excesses, was an authoritative exponent of high themes befitting the chair of the philosopher and theologian. He had withdrawn from the wreck to philosophize upon the shore ; Hartley was ever ready to launch his unseaworthy craft in new waters.

It is probable that their divergencies were not merely constitutional, but were in some measure due to the diverse effects of drink and opium.

To take but one example. In seasons of retrospective searchings of heart, when, "failure, which means weakness entailed upon, incorporated with the system of the soul," was darkly manifest, and when the ghosts of past sins arose from the dead and would not be exorcised, there was little likeness to be discerned between Hartley and his father. And yet at these times character is disclosed and all the poor disguises frail humanity puts on are torn asunder.

In these crises Coleridge can find no words strong enough to express the torture of his mind, the horror as of thick darkness closing around him, the despair which holds him in its paralysing clutch. "Conceive a spirit in hell," he writes, "employed in tracing out to others the road to that heaven from which his crimes exclude him. In short, conceive whatever is most wretched, helpless and hopeless, and you will form as tolerable a notion of my state as it is possible for a good man to have." And again, in another letter of the same year (1814): ". . . for ten years the anguish of my spirit has been indescribable, the sense of my danger staring, but the consciousness of my guilt worse,

far worse than all. I have prayed, with drops of agony on my brow, trembling, not only before the justice of my Maker, but even before the mercy of my Redeemer."

Coleridge, in fact, knew probably as much as any human being could be fated to know, of the workings of "that impure passion of remorse" as he describes it in the first scene of his play:—

"Remorse is as the heart in which it grows:  
If that be gentle, it drops balmy dews  
Of true repentance; but if proud and gloomy,  
It is a poison-tree that, pierced to the inmost,  
Weeps only tears of poison."

And he adds that in the play remorse is everywhere distinguished from virtuous penitence.

Hartley's penitence was of a quality never likely to degenerate into remorse. There was no poison in his tears, and his childlike trust in God's infinite mercy preserved him from despair.

Time after time the poor prodigal, returning from the far-off country, took the well-trodden road to his Father's house, never once doubting the door would be open to receive him. Contrition was deep and sincere, confession only too easy, but his repentance was singularly lacking in the third element necessary for its completion—amendment of life.

As far as it is possible to form a judgment from his many references to his own unhappy condition of irreclaimable power of will, it would seem as if his tendency was to dissociate motive from action, and to regard his misdeeds as involuntary, if not inevitable. Almost before

he could speak plain he had declared himself to be of a very religious turn of mind, and this persuasion was undoubtedly throughout his life founded upon fact.

Already in his boyhood he had been inclined to take a dispassionate and autobiographical survey of his character, and the following memorandum in his notebook, though undated, belongs to these early days.

"It has been among my day dreams for some time past to write a history of my own life and feelings, beginning from my earliest remembrance, and continuing it at intervals so as to form a sort of review of my own character. This scheme will probably never, except partially, be put in execution. Besides that the effect of such an employment would be to nourish a self-love, a respect for the faults of self, to confine myself to truth would be too much to expect of myself."

The passage is curiously indicative of the estimate he is able to form of his own character. It would be impossible for him to confine himself to truth. This is no unreasonable supposition. Introspection will nourish self-love. This again was to be expected; but why respect should be awakened by a more intimate knowledge of his faults it is less easy to imagine. His expressions to his father, in a letter already quoted, bear upon them the impress of a more settled and more mournful conviction, when he speaks of the helpless consciousness of faults "conducting to anything rather than amendment." This consciousness, it may truly be said, was the insecure foundation underlying the whole structure of his life.

In forming a judgment necessarily affected by many mysterious affinities and inconsistencies, there is one



most remarkable testimony to be received, expressed in unmistakeable language and with deliberate conviction, by an expert in psychological problems whose verdict is unaffected by personal considerations.

It is certainly curious to find Carpenter, in his work upon Mental Physiology, bringing forward Hartley Coleridge's case as one of the strongest instances of irresistible predispositions.

"The experiences of those who, like Hartley Coleridge, have inherited the craving for alcoholic excitement, together with the weakness of will which makes them powerless to resist it, whilst all their better nature prompts the struggle, must satisfy any one who carefully weighs them, how closely connected their physical state is with the physical constitution which they inherit, and how small is their own moral responsibility for errors which are mainly attributable to the faults of their progenitors." And he quotes a sentence from one of Robert Collyer's sermons. "I heard a man say that for eight-and-twenty years the soul within him had to stand like an unsleeping sentinel, guarding his appetite for strong drink. To be a man at last under such a disadvantage, not to mention a saint, is as fine a piece of grace as can well be seen."

It was surely by a miracle of grace that Hartley, in spite of the error of his ways, preserved a spirit still responsive to the purest, truest ideals. Erring but guileless, guilty but forgiven, he was, in his own words—

"An unsphered angel woefully astray."

## CHAPTER XIV

### LIFE AT GRETA HALL

The Southey household—Sara Coleridge's philosophical and metaphysical studies—Necessity of psychological knowledge—Domestic life at Greta Hall—Shelley at Keswick—"Life of Bayard"—Southey's Book of the Church—Wordsworth's "Ecclesiastical Sonnets"—Derwent Coleridge's career—Sara Coleridge's marriage

**T**HOUGH within such a short distance of one another, the brother and sister were not during the next few years drawn into any real intimacy of familiar intercourse. Greta Hall could not be a home to Hartley, but though separated from her own brothers, and with a father whose name, however honoured, had never been a household word, Sara Coleridge had had from her childhood a large experience of family life. Southey's house was full of children. Death had indeed bereft him of three, and when he looked upon the vacant places in his nursery he had found "religion the sure and only source of comfort" for the absence of those who had been the joy of his heart. "There is a love," he writes, "which passes the love of women and which is more lightly alarmed than the wakefullest jealousy." His paths were paths of pleasantness and he was content with his lot, but his uncertain hold upon his earthly treasures kept

the instability of human happiness ever before his eyes. "My happiest moments are those when I am looking on to another state of being in which there shall be no other change than that of progressing in knowledge and thereby in power and enjoyment."

And yet with unconquerable courage after each blow had fallen he once again took up his daily task and preserved, even in middle age, the heart of the boy. No childish laughter was hushed in his presence, no child beneath his roof was taught to regard his study as forbidden ground. To most men the presence of two sisters-in-law in the house might have been a source of domestic friction, but though vehement in argument and unmeasured in his language upon public questions, he had none of the irritability sometimes accompanying the overstrained energies of a literary man.

He could come in to the eight o'clock family breakfast after two hours' writing already accomplished, with his girls around him—Edith, Isabel, Kate, "my dark-eyed Bertha, timid as a dove," and Cuthbert, stalwart, and tall of stature—Og the King of Bashan, as they called him—and be as free in spirit as one of themselves.

Though poor Mrs. Coleridge might be dispirited and anxious, Sara was happily not in the position of an only daughter. Within the Southey circle she had those who regarded her rather as a sister than a cousin. And her uncle expended upon her throughout her youth, not only the ever ready guidance of an experienced teacher but the watchful affection of a father.

Up to the time of her engagement, her studies, as already stated, had been chiefly linguistic. She excelled in the facile acquisition of modern languages and was

a good Latin and Greek scholar. Education in the Southey household was a serious pastime; familiar lessons were given upon abstruse subjects, and even Cuthbert was brought up at home.

But after Sara Coleridge's visit to London in 1822 her attention was more concentrated upon the system of philosophy with which her father's name was associated, and directed to a scientific and historical knowledge of theology at which few women would have aimed. "Led by circumstances as well as by natural congeniality of mind," so her daughter writes, "to a study of her father's philosophy, she then devoted herself with all the fulness of matured conviction, to the task of illustrating those great principles of Christian truth which it was the main object of his life to defend."

Upon the subjects of Transcendental Philosophy and German Idealism her two principal guides, Wordsworth and Southey, could throw but little light. Southey's answer to Henry Taylor, when he consulted him as to the manner in which such studies should be carried on, was to the effect that with regard to metaphysics he knew nothing and could say nothing; Coleridge knew all that could be known concerning them, and if any one could get at the kernel of his philosophy in the "Friend" and in "Aids to Reflection" he might "crack peach stones without fear of cracking his teeth."

Wordsworth's natural religion, and the intimate communion with Nature in which he had formulated a system of interpretation of her secrets and contrasts, of her spiritual truths and her humblest types, was equally remote from what Coleridge himself designates "as the holy jungle of transcendental metaphysics."

It is therefore the more surprising to discover that Sara Coleridge, with no living teacher at hand and with all the agitations and uncertainties of a belated love affair to absorb her thoughts, should have set herself to master, not only Coleridge's own theories and conceptions, but the works of the German writers from whom in some instances they were derived: Schelling, Schlegel, Kant, Fichte, as well as Saumarez and many others. She held that some careful study of psychology, "some systematic metaphysical training, ought to form a part of every gentleman's education, and more especially of every man who is destined for one of the learned professions, and still more especially for men who undertake to write on controversial divinity. A writer on doctrine and the *rationale* of religious belief ought at least to know those principles of psychology and other branches of metaphysics in which all schools agree, and to have had some exercise of thought in this particular direction, and of course such a study must improve the faculty of insight into all works of reasoning which treat of the higher subjects of human thought."

Such studies, though necessary for a polemical divine, could hardly be regarded as indispensable for the development of the feminine mind. In her case there was, however, together with the desire to understand her father's philosophic faculties, an eager pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and a joy in its acquisition, enhanced by the greatness and multitude of the intellectual difficulties in the way.

The rambling house Coleridge had tenanted in his youth had had some strange inhabitants, and it still



sheltered dissimilar, if not incongruous, representatives of various types and ages—the elder women, unselfishly fulfilling the humblest domestic offices; the master of the house in his library with its noble outlook over the Lake, as Coleridge had first seen it, “encircled by the most fantastic mountains that earthquakes ever made in sport,” ceaselessly intent upon composition; and in the background a group of girls, the Southey sisters and Dora Wordsworth, their frequent companion, impulsive, warm-hearted as in childhood, when her wild spirits and disordered curls had incurred Mrs. Coleridge’s displeasure, and as great a contrast as ever to Sara the girl-student who (possibly in the organ-room where her father had seen his midnight visions) bent in silence over the work of some German mystic of which no hand but hers would turn the page.

As years went on the family circle was more frequently broken. Celebrity involved the reception and entertainment of many strangers; some distinguished in various branches of literature or art, and some to whom Southey’s Laureateship was a distinction to stimulate curiosity.

When the opportunity arose to befriend a student or encourage a writer, especially one unknown, unsuccessful or younger than himself, the pen at once dropped from Southey’s busy fingers and his helping hand was held out.

Sara was only a child of ten when Shelley was for a short time a near neighbour, or she might have more clearly recalled his personality, so vivid and attractive as to take even Southey’s just judgment by storm.

“There is a man at Keswick,” he writes, “who acts

upon me as my own ghost would do. He is just what I was in 1794. His name is Shelley, son to the member for Shoreham, with £6,000 a year entailed upon him, and as much more in his father's power to cut off."

Shelley's imprudent marriage, the publication of his pamphlet, "Necessity of Atheism," his expulsion from Oxford, and his inclination to Pantheistic philosophy, were alike condoned in the pleasure of putting the young poet upon a course of Berkeley; and Shelley for his part was, as Southey averred, equally delighted and surprised to meet for the first time with a man who understood him, and did him full justice: the only difference between them being that Shelley was nineteen and Southey thirty-seven. And Southey could hopefully declare that he would not be long in convincing him that he might be a true philosopher and do a great deal of good with £6,000 a year, "the thought of which troubles him more a great deal at the present than the want of sixpence (and I have known such a want) ever did me." It is curious to recall impressions afterwards so signally reversed. Indifference to worldly and adventitious advantages helped to open the doors of Greta Hall with hospitable readiness to passing strangers. Ticknor was by no means the only eminent American who found his way there. Scott and Landor, Carlyle, Lockhart, Sir William Hamilton, and Rogers were amongst some of the most eminent visitors to the Lakes during Sara's girlhood, but some whose names are closely associated with them, amongst others Dr. Arnold, who lived at Fox How from 1831 to 1841, and Harriet Martineau, who came to Ambleside only in 1846, were better known to Hartley than to his sister.

Nevertheless she had no want of intellectual and other companionship; and it was not the lack of this but the anxiety, recurrent and insistent, as to Hartley's mode of life which gave increased soberness to these waiting years. Industry was sometimes the only cure for depression, and in 1824 she was correcting the proofs of a translation from the French issued in two volumes under the title of "The Right Joyous and Pleasant History of the Facts, Tests and Prowesses of the Chevalier Bayard, the Good Knight without Fear and without Reproach; by the loyal Servant." It was first published in 1829, and the style and the execution were said to be very good.

During her last years at Keswick another new interest had arisen to supplement, rather than to replace or diminish, her studies in German mysticism and other philosophical subjects. The three writers, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, linked together in popular phraseology as the poets of the Lakes, were, in their very different ways, exponents and defenders of the Church of England. Anterior to the great revival of Catholic doctrines and practices within her pale; before the Tracts for the Times had appeared, when Keble was still at Oxford, and Newman's name was unknown to any but a small circle of friends, already in 1821 Southey had spoken of his thoughts and Wordsworth's as travelling in the same direction; for, whilst he was projecting his "Book of the Church," Wordsworth was composing his first "Ecclesiastical Sonnets." Sara therefore, both at Greta Hall and Rydal Mount, must have heard much of the historic past, the permanent structure, and the hereditary claims of the Church of England. A practical

acquaintance with her services and ceremonies was not always regarded by her apologists as the necessary accompaniment of their veneration for Apostolic doctrine and Episcopal rights. As early as 1812 Wordsworth had declared he *would shed his blood* to defend the Church of England, but confessed that he did not know when he had been inside an English church. And Charles Lamb accounted for Southey's conversion by the assertion that "he had lost his way in Utopia and found it in Old Sarum."

In later years both he and Wordsworth became regular in their attendance at Crosthwaite Church or Rydal Chapel, but they had not drawn their inspiration from personal contact with the Church's outward forms or inner spirit. The ideal prompting their verse and prose was nevertheless one of order and symmetry, of dignified traditions and irresistible claims, since both the Church's stability and sanctity were of Divine origin. Founded upon a rock, she was to their minds guarded, though not bounded, by the seas which washed the shores of the British Isles.

Southey had found it impossible to carry out the object indicated by the title of his book, "*Vindiciæ Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ*," without carrying the war into the enemy's country, and could safely declare that he could wield a sledge hammer as well as his old friend Wat Tyler himself. Nevertheless, his first desire was to defend established truths, and, without being too much drawn into the restless sea of controversy, Sara, upon these subjects, shared her uncle's opinions and predilections. Wordsworth, it has been well said, united the religion of the philosopher with the religion of the

churchman ; one rarer thing he could not do—he could not unite the religion of the philosopher with the religion of the saint.<sup>1</sup> This may be in part the reason that, in spite of the deep veneration with which she regarded him, manifest or lasting tokens of his influence upon Sara Coleridge are rather to be found in her intellectual beliefs than in her spiritual life. Indeed, to her independent spirit, the truth, as she saw it revealed in the atmosphere surrounding it, was more potent than any personal influences ; and when once the path was pointed out she was content to traverse it alone and had a tendency to outstrip her guides.

From time to time she was again in London and visiting her father at Highgate, though less alert and eager to receive fresh impressions than she had been when personal hopes and fears had not crowded so thickly upon her mind, and she regretted that when Coleridge's "Table Talk" came to be published, her own recollections were not more available. Alone with his daughter, he led her into the misty regions where it was hard to grasp clear ideas or palpable facts ; and she became a listener rather than a learner.

So these last years of her studious life at Keswick went on. Thoughtful, gentle, and persevering, Dorothy Wordsworth could now see nothing to be desired in her unless it might be a greater exuberance of youthful spirits ; and the same close observer noted that Mrs. Coleridge, perceiving the uselessness of her struggle against adverse circumstances, was learning wisdom and contentment in the school of adversity.

Solid and enduring comfort was also to be found in

<sup>1</sup> "Life of Wordsworth," F. W. H. Myers.



Derwent's uninterrupted and satisfactory progress. His successful University career had been followed by ordination, and the future Head of St. Mark's Training College for Teachers and Prebendary of St. Paul's was already full of high interests and practical activities: a keen educationalist when such matters were far less considered than at present.

Thus the general horizon was lighter when, in September, 1829, the long engagement came to an end and Henry Nelson Coleridge was married to his cousin Sara, at Crosthwaite Church—the same old church on the outskirts of Keswick to which Coleridge had brought his three children together to be baptized; where Southey wandered in his old age seeking with lasting fidelity but failing memory his children's graves, and where he himself now lies buried.

## CHAPTER XV

### SARA'S EARLY MARRIED LIFE

Early married life—Henry Nelson Coleridge—Joanna Baillie—Mrs. Coleridge—Coleridge's death, July, 1834—Its effect on his friends—Hartley's affection for his father—Codicil to Coleridge's will—Sara Coleridge's appreciation of her father—Editorship of "Table Talk" and "Biographia Literaria"—Education of children—Herbert Coleridge's career—"Phantasmion"

**D**OMESTIC interests, household cares, parental hopes and fears, the sober joys of happy family life, are not (unless it be to gratify the taste for looking through a keyhole, so curiously irrespective of what lies beyond) matters needing to be chronicled. Sara Coleridge's early married life was in no way exceptional, unless in so far that it was irradiated by clearer intellectual perceptions and governed by higher principles than may often be the case.

The Coleridges had taken a small house at Hampstead, and their distance from the centre of London and somewhat restricted means deprived them of the society in which they would have found themselves most at home. Henry Coleridge, when not on circuit, was almost daily with his father-in-law at Highgate; but they had no carriage, and his wife's delicate health made it often impossible for her to go so far. She therefore saw less

of her father than might have been expected. Nevertheless, her husband's social proclivities and versatile gifts kept her in touch with the world outside their home.

Before his marriage he had accompanied his cousin, William Hart Coleridge, Bishop of Barbadoes, on a tour through his diocese, and he wrote an agreeable book entitled "Six Months in the West Indies." Unfortunately in the Preface he thought fit to refer in disrespectful terms to the medicine chest of one of his aunts as the "Cave of Death," and this harmless jest gave so much offence that, though he was a man of twenty-seven earning his own living, he was obliged (in deference to outraged family feelings) to suppress the whole edition—surely a curious illustration of the exercise of parental discipline in those days.

To his own children he was a delightful playfellow, but they were still quite young when he died of spinal paralysis on 26 January, 1843.

Though so alert in spirit, he had a keen interest in Coleridge's monologues which rendered him a patient listener with no desire to stem or direct the current of talk: a hopeless task even for the poet's contemporaries. Indeed Southey, who knew him as well as most people, declared that when he wanted to talk business with him, he expected him to begin about animal magnetism or some equally congruous subject and "go on from Dan to Beersheba in his endless loquacity." That loquacity provided copy for the "Table Talk" and footnotes of the "Biographia Literaria," prepared in part for publication by Henry Nelson Coleridge and completed and published by his widow. These were, however, later literary produc-

tions. During the first years of their marriage, when their home was at Hampstead, four children (of whom Berkeley and Florence died in infancy) were born to them, and family cares forbade any long or serious literary undertakings. Sara Coleridge's intellectual pleasures were chiefly concerned with her pride in each fresh evidence of her husband's pre-eminence in accomplishments and scholarship, which saved her from any sense of mental superiority. Her reserved and sensitive nature was invigorated by his gaiety and conversational brilliancy, and her spirits sustained by his persistent optimism.

Others, too, there were who, as links with the past or present centres of literary activity, awakened old impressions or fresh trains of thought. Mrs. Joanna Baillie was a welcome guest. Though Mrs. Coleridge had no high opinion of her critical or poetical powers, never had old age appeared to her more lovely and interesting: "The face, the dress, the quiet subdued motions, the silver hair, the calm *in-looking* eye, the pale, yet not unhealthy skin, all are in harmony: this is winter with all its own peculiar loveliness of snows and paler sunshine, no forced flowers or fruits to form an unnatural contrast with the general air of the prospect." The Lambs also came once and again to Hampstead, and she shared in some degree her father's affection for Charles Lamb and admiration for his rare genius and affectionate heart. Irving too, who died in the same year as Lamb and Coleridge, interested her deeply, though she concurred in Coleridge's opinion that the undue balance of his mind amounted to madness. And her father himself came to the house, and when alone with

her was "almost always on the star-paved road, taking in the whole heavens in his circuit."

Her mother had her home with the Henry Coleridges until her death : their house affording her the happiest of all sanctuaries. She watched her daughter with almost too solicitous tenderness, and took part in all domestic interests ; still delighting to dwell with the garrulity of old age upon events and persons connected with her married life at Keswick, of which time had softened, but not obliterated, the remembrance.

When some years later Aubrey de Vere (whose friendship with Sara Coleridge made him a constant visitor to the house) found her alone, she spoke of Sara's unusual loveliness in girlhood, so great that when she played with her cousins on the lawn people stood looking out at them from the windows, wondering at the beauty of the group. She proudly assured him a precipitate lover had proposed to marry the child when she was thirteen ; but all her lovers had died, so she would have been a widow whoever she had married. Then, turning from Sara to her own husband, she recalled how, when they were living together at Greta Hall, Hazlitt worried them with his visits, and how De Quincey used to say to Coleridge : "I should be so much obliged if you would speak a little more near the level of my comprehension." And then, unconsciously throwing a stray shaft of light upon one of the causes of their estrangement, she remembered the question she herself would put to her husband : "Man, do you really understand yourself ?" She seldom saw him in the last years of his life, and it was not likely ties so long broken should be reunited. He had voluntarily put himself at a distance, not only from



his family but from many of his old friends; and yet it is hardly possible to over-estimate the strange ascendancy he maintained over their minds and hearts. His voice still came to them as from the mount. Prophet, preacher, metaphysician, poet; they were no empty titles he had arrogated to himself, but widely recognized as constituting rightful, if ideal, claims to the chair of the teacher. Even Harriet Martineau, sceptical and on the defensive, most assuredly no enthusiast, with an imagination only too easily controlled by common sense, was anxious to visit him at Highgate and glad to have seen his weird face and heard his dreamy voice, and could add that "her notion of possession and prophecy—of involuntary speech from involuntary brain action, had been clearer ever since."

Carlyle, in some respects an unsympathetic critic, yet imputed to him a power to which he would himself have laid no claim, when in reference to Sterling's ordination he wrote: "This clerical aberration we have ascribed to Coleridge, and do clearly think that if there had been no Coleridge, neither had this been—nor had English Puseyism or some other strange portents been."

Coleridge's death in July, 1834, made an epoch in the lives of many, besides those of his own family, who had been apparently severed from him by time and circumstance. With the exception of six weeks passed together on the continent, Wordsworth had seen little of him for twenty years, yet his departure awakened the dormant and tenacious affection that had withstood so many shocks, and the old poet declared his mind had been habitually present with



SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE IN 1811  
FROM THE PAINTING BY WASHINGTON ALISTON IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY



him, with the accompanying feeling that he was still in the flesh. The breaking of that frail tie left him desolate.

Sir Walter Scott had died two years before, and now Charles Lamb, Crabbe, Mrs. Hemans, James Hogg the Ettrick Shepherd, and others younger than himself had all departed ; and of these and of Coleridge Wordsworth wrote in 1835 :—

“Nor has the rolling year twice measured,  
From sign to sign, its steadfast course,  
Since every mortal power of Coleridge  
Was frozen at its marvellous source ;

The rapt one of the Godlike forehead,  
The heaven-eyed creature sleeps in earth :  
And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,  
Has vanished from his lonely hearth.

Like clouds that rake the mountain-summits,  
Or waves that own no curbing hand,  
How fast has brother followed brother,  
From sunshine to the sunless land !”

At Rydal Mount, by those to whom he had once been so familiar a presence, Coleridge above all could not be forgotten.

To take another instance of unalterable personal attachment, the impression his death had made upon Charles Lamb's mind was so all-pervading that, during the few months he survived him, he would break off in the midst of a conversation to exclaim irrelevantly, “Coleridge is dead !” as if the cry of his heart could not

be suppressed. "His great and dear spirit haunts me ; never saw I his likeness, nor probably the world can see again. I seem to love the house he died in more passionately than when he lived. What was his mansion is consecrated to me a Chapel."

The breach with Southey had been wider than that with Wordsworth ; but few friends had been so near to him as Coleridge in his youth. No one had taken his place ; indeed his strenuous life had left him little leisure for friendships, and Henry Taylor was the only one of a younger generation whom he had taken into his heart of hearts.

Some sore feeling was aroused in the family at the details concerning Coleridge's life and personality De Quincey was publishing in "Tait's Magazine." He undoubtedly transgressed the obligations of past intimacy and friendship in order to gratify public curiosity, and yet there was no measure in his praise, and he spoke of him as possessing the "most spacious intellect, the subtlest and most comprehensive that in his judgment ever existed among men." The general mourning was no passing sentiment. Among the deaths in that year—and there were so many that Crabb Robinson said the world seemed to be cracking all about him—there was not one more deeply felt.

The news had not come as a surprise to Hartley. There had been indeed no protracted anxiety, and even Sara and Derwent, who were in London, had not seen their father for fear of causing agitation ; yet at a distance no fluctuating hopes could dissipate fears, and in a letter to his mother Hartley declared he had been prepared for the blow, though it fell upon him as the



fulfilment of an unbelieved prophecy. He nightly dreamed of his father and had daily an especial longing to see him. "I often find my mind disputing with itself—what would my father think of this? and when the recollection awakes, that I have no father, it appears more like a possible evil than an actual bereavement."

It is a striking instance of fidelity to old impressions and old associations. There had been no recent intercourse, hardly any personal contact since the childish days at Greta Hall, except when as a schoolboy he went, pale and trembling with the joy of the unlooked-for summons, to see his father on his visit to Ambleside; or again when, after he left Oxford, he saw him in London, and the melancholy sense of an irretrievable fall heavily silenced reproaches on the one side and excuses on the other. It might be said with truth that Hartley's thoughts were often after-thoughts. His mind unconsciously projected itself backwards, clinging with unflinching affection to the most trivial incidents and recollections whose outlines no distance could blur. Not only so; in serious hours of intellectual exercise rather than effort (for effort in this connection is a word hardly to be associated with Hartley), he had become thoroughly conversant not only with his father's poetry and philosophy but with his spirit.

Wordsworth, who never failed in attentive care for him at every crisis of his life, was with him when he received the tidings of his father's death, and found him calm but much dejected, deeply lamenting that he had seen so little of him during the course of their lives.

The codicil to Coleridge's will, drawn up four years before his death, shows justifiable apprehensions, together with a manifest desire to minimise any sense of distrust, and a tender regard for Hartley's feelings.

"Most desirous to secure as far as in me lies for my dear son Hartley the tranquility indispensable to any continued and successful exertion of his literary talents, and which from the like characters of our minds in this respect, I know to be especially requisite for his happiness, and persuaded that he will recognize in this provision that anxious affection by which it is dictated, I affix this codicil to my last will and testament." And then he goes on to provide that Hartley's share of what he is able to bequeath (the money being equally divided after their mother's death between his three children) should be left in the hands of trustees who shall "dispose of the interest or proceeds of the same portion to or for the use of my dear son Hartley Coleridge . . . as they shall deem conducive to the attainment of my object in adding this codicil, namely the anxious wish to ensure for my son the continued means of a home, in which I comprise board, lodging and raiment. Providing that nothing in this codicil shall be so interpreted as to interfere with my son Hartley Coleridge's freedom of choice respecting his place of residence, or with his power of disposing of his portion by will after his decease, according as his own judgment and affections may decide."

Hartley was never likely to resent restrictions placed upon a liberty he was but too well aware he might abuse. In his usual spirit of sincere if desultory

introspection—his conscience throwing a wandering rather than concentrated light upon the past—in a letter to Derwent he reproaches himself for unfilial insensibility, envying others their poignancy of sorrow. He declares his grief is utterly incommensurate to the occasion, and yet that he never forgot his father, and that amongst his many sins no want of love towards him could be numbered. "He, and he only," he adds, "made me a Christian."

In truth, though bereavement might enhance the value of what he had lost, there is no doubt that early impressions had never been effaced. He was older, and more readily affected than his brother and sister by the erratic manifestations of Coleridge's parental tenderness; a similarity of character giving him an understanding, too intimate to be put into words, of the inroads moral weakness may make upon poetic genius.

His sister's study of their father's mind had been possibly too elaborate, careful, and painstaking. None of the circumstances of his life had diminished her admiration for his genius and his character, and it would not be true to say that death itself was a deed of canonization, so high had been the place he already held in her thoughts and her esteem. "We mourn," she wrote, "not only the removal of one closely united to us by nature and intimacy, but the extinction of a light which made earth more spiritual and heaven in some sort more visible to our apprehension. . . . His frail house of clay was so illumined that its decaying condition was the less perceptible."

Yet it is a significant, if slight, indication of the difference between them, that whilst Hartley invariably refers to him as "my father," Sara, even in letters to intimate friends and to her husband, often speaks of him as "Coleridge." Though it would have been impossible to exceed the measure of veneration and admiration she accorded him, and after his death she was engrossed by the work of elucidating and editing his writings, the personal note is wanting. Fortunately at this time her husband was still in full health and strength, and able to devote his spare time and energies to record, in the "Table Talk," the sayings he had gathered up; and, in the "Biographia Literaria," he is responsible for the first volume of "Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare"; his annotations and his wife's being found together in the earlier portion of the second volume, after which she was left to complete the task alone.

The work presented great difficulties; not one of the least being the excursive character of Coleridge's own mind, leading him constantly off the main track into bewildering side issues.

"The materials," as the Preface sets forth, "were fragmentary in the extreme. Notes of the lecturer, memoranda of the investigator, outpourings of the solitary and self-communing student. The fear of the press was not in them." And of his conversation also "too much was given, all so weighty and so brilliant as to preclude a chance of its all being received—so that it was not seldom passed over the hearer's mind like the sound of many waters." As he himself affirmed, he "had laid too many eggs in the hot sands of this

wilderness the world with the ostrich carelessness and oblivion."

Nevertheless, more than might have seemed possible had been preserved of long discourses and numerous but disarranged and unselected material. Henry Cole-ridge had the qualifications and disqualifications of an enthusiastic disciple for the task he had undertaken. His critical faculties might be somewhat weakened, but there was a corresponding quickening of real insight into the processes by which conclusions had been reached, and a subjection of spirit to the atmosphere, "a Sabbath past expression deep and tranquil and serene"—wherein he could best see disclosed the mind of the seer and teacher; and with a modest confidence he commended "the reliques of a great man to the indulgent consideration of the public."

The Preface to the first volume is dated 1836, and fortunately his wife was not at that time called upon to assume any responsibility for the publication. Her gentle, yet spirited, efforts to shake off the depressing effects of constant ill-health were made chiefly for the sake of her husband and children. It was upon these she lavished her time and thoughts and literary powers, laying aside more serious studies for the work of education.

She seems to have forestalled many educational ideas now widely prevalent, anticipating the desire, too easily exaggerated, to secure a child's attention by such easy and attractive processes as to induce no sense of effort in learning. Her "Pretty Lessons for Good Children" passed through five editions, and, in her skilful hands



at least, the methods employed attained unqualified success.

Coleridge precocity in childhood was markedly exemplified in the third generation. Her little boy Herbert, at four or five years old, had a store of information and acute reasoning powers, the latter being sometimes put into requisition at unsuitable moments. When, for instance, one of his cousins was held up to him as a pattern of obedience, he inquired if he was forced to do as he was told, and when answered in the affirmative his rejoinder was ready: "It's naughty to force him. You know Ulysses said, 'We can't take Troy *by force*.'" When we hear that before he was six years old he was anxious to inform people that Chimborazo, whatever Coley<sup>†</sup> may say, is not so high as Dhawalagiri, the highest of the Himalayas; and that he is certain a wedding of two of his uncle's servants was not so grand as that of Peleus and Thetis on Mount Pelion we may well be thankful that his mother can assure us she had refrained from teaching political economy to so young a child. Yet there was no unwholesome surfeit of knowledge, as is clearly evidenced by Herbert's honourable and brilliant career. He was Newcastle and Balliol scholar in 1847-48, and took a double first-class at Oxford in 1852; he was a fine Icelandic scholar; and at the time of his death, in 1861, he was engaged in preparations for the new English dictionary projected by the Philological Society, of which he was a member.

<sup>†</sup> John Coleridge Patteson, the Martyr Bishop of the Pacific Islands.



HERBERT COLERIDGE, AGED 6



It was in a great measure owing to his mother that he took so high a place at Eton, but there was an interval when she was for the most part confined to her bed ; and as she lay there she wrote, at first chiefly for her own children, her longest consecutive work, the fairy romance "Phantasmion."

## CHAPTER XVI

### "PHANTASMION"

Fairy tales and schoolroom classics—Charles Lamb on children's books—Romance and allegory—The "Story without an End"—"Phantasmion"—Its aim and object—Descriptive powers—Its teaching and lyrics

THE end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century had seen a remarkable revival in books for the young, and many authors of acknowledged excellence had devoted themselves to this department of literature. The old chap books, simple tales enforcing moral precepts by impressive examples of retributive justice—prompt rewards or penalties following with salutary effect after a fashion seldom experienced but much to be desired upon good or evil-doers—had been superseded by more elaborate and detailed expositions of schoolroom codes and parental duties. There was a surprising influx of instructive and moral tales. Mrs. Trimmer inculcated the love of nature and natural history, advocated the claims of the dumb creation, and related the "History of the Robins," where rashness was reproved, unselfishness commended, and industry shown to be the only means of advancement in life. Mrs. Barbauld, in even more high-minded language, invited her child-reader to look



into the world around, and see there some evidence of supreme power and goodness or to learn some useful lesson. Country walks were taken by little boys in irreproachable nankeen suits and wide collars, whose only desire, it appeared, was to ask intelligent leading questions of their older companions as to the habits of birds, the composition of clouds, the germination of plants, the course of streams, and other mysteries of Nature. Miss Edgeworth, as the minute chronicler of daily life, had aimed at fixing the attention of young people by the flow of her narrative and the action of her characters, and had set herself to expound a system of conscientious educational discipline, and to give those in authority rules as to the best means of carrying it out. The volume rightly entitled “The Parent’s Assistant,” and many other of her tales, so skilfully combined instruction with amusement that a child, however desirous to evade the first, could hardly succeed in dis severing them. Sometimes, as in Thomas Day’s “Sandford and Merton,” and Mrs. Inchbald’s “Nature and Art,” such tales were made vehicles of reproof or admonition to grown-up persons, though happily at this period it was still considered impossible so far to reverse the natural order of things as to contrast the precocious piety of the child with the indifference of the unregenerate parent.

As early as 1802, when Charles Lamb was selecting books for the six-year-old Hartley, he writes to Coleridge to complain that “Mrs. Barbauld’s stuff has banished all the old classics of the nursery”—the shopman hardly condescended to show them—“though Mrs. B.’s and Mrs. Trimmer’s nonsense lay in piles about. Knowledge so insignificant and vapid as Mrs. B.’s books

convey, it seems must come to a child in the *shape* of *knowledge*, and his empty noddle must be turned with conceit of his own powers when he has learnt that a horse is an animal, and Billy is better than a horse and such-like, instead of that beautiful interest in wild tales which made a child a man, while all the time he suspected himself to be no bigger than a child. Science has succeeded to poetry no less in the walks of little children than with man. Is there no way of averting this sore evil? Think what you would have been now, if instead of being fed with Tales and old men's fables in childhood you had been crammed with geography and natural history?"

It must be remembered that Lamb was hardly likely to do justice to the incursions of feminine intellects and pens into the field of literature. He was pleased to refer disrespectfully to Mrs. Inchbald and Mrs. Barbauld as "two bald women," though he acknowledged Mrs. Inchbald to be "the only endurable clever woman he had ever known," and he was inconsistently delighted to co-operate with his sister in writing for Godwin's series of children's books. They sat at one table writing their "Tales from Shakespeare" and he was filled with admiration at her powers of adaptation and her talent for avoiding "adult complexities."

"Mrs. Leicester's School," a joint production, is a collection of short stories, all, with three exceptions, by Mary Lamb. They breathe a spirit of reasonable sensibility and an unexaggerated but unhesitating recognition of the claims of duty. Affection rather than passion is the motive power exemplified. They are not like Mrs. Trimmer's stories and Mrs. Marcet's dialogues,

primarily educational, nor are they written for a religious purpose and from a religious standpoint like Hannah More's "Repository" Tracts, which achieved so unprecedented a success that "Cœlebs in search of a Wife," stigmatized by Charles Lamb as a "poor novel with dull religion," went through eleven editions in nine months. The later Evangelical writers, with their studies (often delicately and sympathetically drawn) of a child's instinctive and uncompromising piety, though in some instances marred and disfigured by unhealthy scrupulosity and morbid self-consciousness, appealed to a large public to whom personal spiritual experiences were of more moment than ethical teaching. But these "Sunday Stories" had an essentially prosaic setting. The incidents recorded and characters portrayed belonged to the realm of everyday existence. Domestic affairs and rustic annals furnished material for the plot, and imaginative children sought more tempting and forbidden fruit upon book-shelves containing the literature intended for their elders. "Macbeth is a pretty composition but an awful one," notes little Marjorie Fleming in her amazingly premature diary; "the Newgate Calendar is very instructive; Dr. Swift's works are very funny," and Tom Jones is especially singled out for praise, though a mild corrective was supplied by "Miss Egward's tails," also commended as very good. Charles Lamb might well lament the age when Jack's ascent of his beanstalk and Cinderella's lost slipper were undeniable historical facts.

In the school of romance and allegory two great masters had indeed for long reigned supreme, not only in the hearts of the young but in the estimation of culti-

vated students. Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe," with its rational and yet enthralling adventures, had found imitators of much inferior merit wholesomely occupied with the desire to amuse rather than to admonish. Of old Bunyan had depicted the journey to the Celestial City, and the exciting dangers to be encountered, in colours so vivid as to inevitably dazzle a child's imagination, even when seen through a luminous mist of legendary language and allegorical metaphors. The mystical romanticists were hardly known in England as the authors of books to be given to children until some thirty years later. La Motte Fouqué's visions of terror and enchantment, destined to dwell for ever in childhood's waking dreams, were not translated into English until the forties, and the revival of allegory, no longer as the exponent of Puritan tenets, but as the illustration of Catholic doctrines in the works of Adams, Wilberforce, and Monroe, was one of the outcomes of the Tractarian movement.

Sara Coleridge, deeply concerned in everything affecting the moral and intellectual development and training of children, had, as her letters have shown, very strong and definite views of her own upon these and other relative subjects. The close observation naturally spent upon her own children may well have been at once instructive and misleading, since it is dangerous to generalize from the idiosyncrasies of an individual child. But she received a passport from their hands to the land of promise, the fair inheritance of which childhood is often too soon bereft. She had studied its language, understood its customs, and naturally took an especial interest in its literature. Many of the books issued,

whether of a moral or evangelical type, were distasteful to her. They were too often books *about* children rather than books *for* children : and she strongly objected to fiction as a vehicle for inculcating Christian truth, as if it were a pill needing to be sugared. For instance, though she read Miss Tytler's popular work, “ Grave and Gay,” with great pleasure, she found fault with its aims and construction. “ It is not in such scraps, nor with such a context, however pretty in its way, that I should like to present the sublime truths of Christianity to the youthful mind : ‘ Florence put the cherry into her mouth and was going to eat it all up,’ etc.—just before or after extracts from the Sermon on the Mount, or allusions to the third chapter of St. John's Gospel. . . . As to the utility of this and other such works, that is, whether or no they answer their *professed purpose*, I could write a long essay which my readers would suspect to be more than half borrowed from S. T. C. and H. N. C.”

Strangely enough, she also considered the beautiful simplicity and mystery of the “ Story without an End,” translated from the German of Carové by Mrs. Austin, as “ quite unfit for juvenile readers. None but mature minds well versed in the artificialities of sentimental literature can understand the inner meanings of it ; and I do not think it has that *body* of visual imagery and adventure which renders many a tale and allegory delightful to those who cannot follow the author's drift. Bees and flies are talked *about* but not *described* so as to give a child any clearer notion of them and their properties than he originally had, and all that is ascribed to them, all the sentiments put into their mouths, as



one may say, are such as can breed nought but confusion in the juvenile brain."

The criticism marks not so much a defect as a want in her appreciative powers. There are mysterious shadowed glades and dim distances into whose solemn depths one may not penetrate. Here she is unconsciously falling into the error she has condemned. Botanical facts are to be blended with fiction and, instead of the natural joy the child finds in the companionship of bees and flowers, he is to derive definite and instructive ideas of their habits and organization. There is an indescribable charm, even upon the title-page, of the volume she criticizes—"A Story without an End." It at once conveys a sense of illimitable time and space. There is nothing to fetter the imagination in the description of *the* child and *the* garden. The child has no name, the garden no locality. The allegory has no interpreter, and the symbol is hidden in the heart of a rose. But the story has the misty, dewy freshness of the morning, not yet dispersed and banished by the noonday sun, and some children may well have loved the mystery of the half-awakened world. Little Herbert Coleridge, however, intelligent and argumentative, shared his mother's disapproval, and observed contemptuously that "*That child* was always asleep or else dreaming."

He had been, as we have seen, beguiled into paths of knowledge by the pains taken to cultivate his habits of observation and the careful selection of prints and toys. His mother besides being his friend and counsellor, was a judicious if somewhat too anxious teacher; but her weak and uncertain health made the society of

her children more than she could bear without over-fatigue. In 1836 she wrote: “My turn of strength perhaps will come; but at present my health is like the prospect of lake and mountain at Keswick, when the whole being involved in mist, one might as well be in a flat unwatered country, for all the advantage one has of scenery. Could I be sure that health and strength were indeed behind the cloud!”

Thrown back upon herself in the comparative solitude of a sick-room, she conceived and executed her only work of fiction, written for the children to whose enjoyment in more active ways she could no longer minister. It is her longest original composition, and in it, as Lord Coleridge states in his Preface to the edition issued in 1874, “the delicate imagination, the clear and picturesque language, the virginal purity of conception” are marked and manifest. Nevertheless its sale was slow and limited, and in 1874 it had long been out of print. This may have been partly the result of the prevalent taste for pictures of character and domestic life—Miss Edgeworth’s, Miss Martineau’s, and Mrs. Mitford’s—soon to be succeeded, if not superseded, by Miss Sewell’s and Miss Yonge’s life-like, but even more elaborate and introspective studies of the aspirations, failings, and tendencies of youthful minds.

At any rate the author herself indulged no illusions with respect to the likelihood of popularity. “In these days,” she writes, “to print a Fairy Tale is the very way to be *not read*, but shoved aside with contempt. I wish, however, I were only as sure that *my* fairy tale is worth printing, as I am that works of this class are wholesome food, by way of variety, for the childish mind. It is

curious that on this point Sir Walter Scott and Charles Lamb, my father, my Uncle Southey, and Mr. Wordsworth, were all agreed."

"Phantasmion's" want of general purpose and meaning she thus defends in a letter to a friend: "It does not belong to that class of fictions in which a single truth or moral is to be illustrated by a sequence of events, of which Miss Edgeworth's and Miss Martineau's tales are instances, or which, as in the "Fairy Queen" and the "Pilgrim's Progress," the character and descriptions are all for the sake of an allegory, which not only shines through them, but determines the general form to be produced, as the osseous system of an animal under the flesh. It belongs to that class of fictions of which "Robinson Crusœ," "Peter Wilkins," "Faust," "Undine," "Peter Schlemihl," and the "Magic Ring," or the "White Cat" and many other fairy tales, are instances: where the ostensible moral, even if there be one, is not the author's chief aim and end, which rather consist in cultivating the imagination, and innocently gratifying the curiosity of the reader, by exhibiting the general and abstract beauty of things through the vehicle of a story, which as it treats of human hopes, and fears and passions and interests and of those changeful events and varying circumstances to which human life is liable may lend an animation to the accompanying descriptions and in return receive a lustre from them."

In this somewhat laboured defence she would appear to do her own work less than justice. Her Envoi to the volume is in a lighter vein.

“Go, little book, and sing of love and beauty,  
To tempt the worldling into fairyland ;  
Tell him that airy dreams are sacred duty,  
Bring better wealth than aught his toils command—  
Toils fraught with mickle harm.

But if thou meet some spirit high and tender,  
On blessed works and noblest love intent,  
Tell him that airy dreams of nature’s splendour,  
With graver thoughts and hallowed musings blent,  
Prove no too earthly charm.”

Here we have a happy phrase, imposing no limitations but faithfully expressive of the spirit of the book. It is an airy dream, through whose intricacies we may thread our way as through the mazes of woodland scenery, now in an open sunlit glade, now by some secret cavern or dark recess, in deepest solitudes or sylvan bowers ; meeting some wild, innocent or fearful beast, some elfin spirit, or strange human inhabitant, with the unsurprised delight or unshaped fear of the wanderer in dreamland. In truth “Phantasmion” needs no apology. It is curious that its author should put it in the same category as “Robinson Crusoe,” “Undine,” and “Faust” ; the first and the last as might have been supposed, wide as the poles asunder. The resemblance to “Undine,” though somewhat superficial, is more apparent. We have again the combination of mortal life in conflict with unseen powers, of human relationships with spirits of the air and water ; pictures of homely cottage interiors against whose windows wild storms supernaturally evoked are beating, or of rich, guarded palace precincts, invaded by

objects of terror and defenceless against shadowy spectral forms, unshaped images of evil, hideous, irresistible, impalpable: visions full of the nameless horror belonging to the stifling oppression of a nightmare. But in Fouqué's tales, under whatever strange and fantastic forms, it is the powers of good and evil that are in ceaseless antagonism. We have a picture of the soul's emancipation from the tyranny of sin and the bondage of fear; there are not only romantic and chivalrous adjuncts and fugitive reminiscences of Spenserian allegory, but there is an atmosphere of religious mysticism in which Catholic emblems and influences play their part. In "Sintram," for instance, the wildest in conception and the richest in pictorial effects of all these marvellous romances, we have the forcible individualization of spiritual agencies—Death the tall man deadly pale in pilgrim's garb, the devil himself in the fearful changeful semblance of the little Master. There are also religious forces underlying, and to some extent determining, the course of events. The supremacy of the cross, the sanctity of the cloister, the power of prayer, the faith triumphant over doubt and despair; all these govern and control the destinies of men.

As the Preface to the second edition states, the supernatural beings of whom we read in "Phantasmion" have rather a German than an English character; but there is no background of symbolism, no suggestion of religious motive, no mystic gloom overshadows them, and they play their parts beneath serener skies. We are led not so much into the realm of romance and chivalry as into the fairyland of Titania and Oberon. It is a fairy tale with



all the linked illusions of a continuous dream ; with the well-authenticated characters of fairy lore revived and rehabilitated ; the wandering adventurous prince, and the fair enchanted maiden, the hero and heroine, without whom no tale of this description could be ranked as a classic. It has thus a strong family likeness to the “White Cat” and “Invisible Prince” of historical fame, and to many of Andersen’s and Grimm’s *märchen*, together with a distinct charm and an original attraction of its own. The easy flow of the narrative, the delicate portrayal of character, and the descriptive power so instinct with poetic insight, are such as to raise it far above the average of juvenile fiction. Moreover, over and over again it betrays that intimate knowledge of a child’s nature so seldom to be acquired except through the affections. There are repeated touches, hardly perceptible to a casual reader, evincing a tender and solicitous observation of the inner workings of a child’s mind. “Phantasmion found,” she writes, “a little child sitting on the floor of a lonely chamber afraid to stir *because he was by himself*.” There was nothing to fear but solitude, a dark barrier closing around him beneath whose oppression of terror he remained dumb and motionless ; he could neither weep nor fly. Thus we may well believe had she suffered herself in her childhood when, sleepless and trembling in her solitary room, she had been forbidden to descend to the cheerful, lighted parlour. Again, when the news of his mother’s death is brought to Phantasmion, we see the natural fierce revolt of youth and joy against death and misfortune. “How darest thou say my mother is dead ?” “Go to her chamber, and see,” replied the man sternly. “And how

can I see her if she is dead?" rejoined the boy, with a tremulous laugh; "can I see the cloud of yesterday in yon clear sky? Like clouds the dead vanish away and we see them no more." The nervous laughter of the sensitive, terrified boy, the sudden anger against the messenger of evil tidings, are all in keeping with his love for his mother. He meets the funeral procession and sees the dead hands, and the limbs stretched upon the bier, and "from that time forth he never spoke of Queen Zolia, but he often beheld her in dreams."

Here we have truly portrayed a child's tenacious constancy and his impregnable reserve. And death once more invades his royal home; when youth's indefinite longings have replaced the joys of childhood. His one dearest friend and comrade has been taken from him, and he goes forth into the world of nature to find a canker-worm at every root and begins to feel the doom of misfortune overhanging all he loves. "When this channel of thought was once opened a hundred rills poured into it at once and filled it to the brim."

It is then that the fairy's wand invests him with magical powers, and he can rise above the earth endowed with fresh and amazing beauty, with buoyant limbs, and wings dazzling and resplendent, embroidered in green and gold. From this moment we have less of the human element, but skilfully interwoven incidents spring up spontaneously for the development of the story.

There is nothing new in the characters and theme; in the fierce dark rival and his murderous attempts upon Phantasmion, nor in the alliance of the malicious step-mother with the loathsome woman-fish. We have read

before of enchanted islands and spell-bound maidens. The charm of Phantasmion is the freshness and grace of the descriptions of scenery; delicate and truthful memorials of the lonely mountain tarns, the green upland pastures, the hidden streams, the purple heather-hills, and the still lake-side, where the writer's childhood and youth had been spent. Here, for instance, there is plainly a reminiscence of Derwentwater or Grasmere. “ From the high ground where the travellers stood they looked down upon a bright blue lake partly girt by hills of soft wavy outline, clad in freshest verdure, to which an amethystine tinge was imparted by blossoms of the fragrant thyme. The skirts of these grassy hills were bathed by the water, while on the opposite side was a thick wood, stretching beyond the rocky shores, which looked as if they had been carved by a graver's chisel and formed bays and promontories overhung here and there with knots of drooping trees. The well-attired valley seemed to smile on the lake, which smiled radiantly in return as a conscious beauty, beaming on her lover, causes his face to brighten with pleasure and hope.”

From her sick-bed, her spirit revisited the haunts of her childhood, and the thought of the green hills swept by mountain breezes, the cool running waters and all the sweetness of the blossoming year, brought peace and refreshment to that chamber of weakness and suffering. She saw once again “ the lustre of a summer's day, which had drowned all things in a flood of hazy brightness ”— “ the distant splendour of moonlight when the hills looked like masses of ebony and seemed for the first time to exhibit their true forms and bulks, while standing

out in bold relief against the deep clear sky . . . the forlorn mountain ash with foliage of transparent brightness whose yellow leaves shaken by the wind fell in a shower from its delicate branches upon the steely pool below ; " or she heard "the soft full murmur of an unimpeded current smoothly sweeping by." And in fairyland she once more found her home.

The descriptions are never elaborated or obtruded so as to interfere with the course of the narrative or weary a childish reader, and all images of dread and danger are subordinated to the gentleness of heroic deeds and innocent loves. As Lord Coleridge affirms, her spirits, whether of the "flowers, the storm, or the earth, have more of the bright and fresh Greek or early Latin imagination in them than in any other or later mythology."

In the same manner the reflections never overburthen and arrest attention, but merely throw passing gleams of light upon the story or help to elucidate character. "The visions of our earliest years soon fade away or serve but to brighten the image of some real object, like forms of frost that shine in the chill morning, but when the sun is high are changed to dewdrops which sparkle on the firm green leaves."

The illustrations hardly interrupt the dialogue and allow no opportunity for moralizing, whilst in the same natural way the observations proffered by age and experience fall unheeded upon youthful ears.

"You that are young," Sanio, the King's minister, says in addressing Phantasmion, "search the past only to illustrate the present ; while for us who are old the present has little interest, except as it reflects the past—



alas, how dully !” And Phantasmion listens with the unconcern of his years to assertions he is unable either to accept or disprove.

Death itself is robbed of its terrors lest a child’s mind should conjure up terrifying visions of darkness and desolation. “ I dreamt that we were in the grave,” says the boy Albinet, roused by his sister from sobbing sleep ; “ and I began to cry : but behold it was only a passage and light was at the other end. ‘ What have we to do with the grave ? ’ said Iarine in a sprightly tone ; ‘ we can never be laid underground, only our worn garments. The earth is nature’s wardrobe ; for out of it every living thing and every tree and plant receive apparel. Ere we go hence we must replace our garments in the great receptacle, that the old materials may serve to make new clothes for other creatures.’ Albinet looked at his pining limb. ‘ I will have finer clothes than these in heaven,’ he said, ‘ and such as fit me better.’ ‘ Think of our garden favourite,’ said the maid again ; ‘ when the streaked petals and shining leaves and upright stem disappeared, was the dear lily dead ? “ No, no,” she might have cried from underground. “ Though all you ever saw of me has gone to dust, yet I am still alive, and shall soon have fresh raiment fit to appear in, unless the spring proves faithless.” ’ Albinet clasped his sister’s hand joyfully. ‘ We too shall be fresh clothed,’ he cried, ‘ and better clothed because our spring will be in a far finer soil and climate.’ ”

Thus, looking beyond the outward emblems of destruction to the land of promise, Mrs. Coleridge brought messages of hope and resurrection to the young companions of her journey. For her it may well have seemed



the journey was nearing its end. A warning note had been sounded, her malady was of a serious character, and she had little reserve of strength. The object of anxious love and unfailing tenderness, with her children at an age most especially demanding a mother's care, it would have been no wonder if human weakness had dimmed the brightness of her faith, or if it had at least found expression in a minor key. But she had ever desired to lead her children along the paths of pleasantness, and though to her the way might be sometimes weary the end was sure. Moreover, her gentle nature had in it no element of bitterness or discontent; it was rather subdued than melancholy, and readily responsive to the lighter moods of those with whom she was brought into contact.

Her pleasure in the creations of her own mind was as genuine as that of the children for whom she wrote, and the graceful lyrics scattered upon the pages of "Phantasmion" have a fanciful gaiety more frequently associated with health and youth than with sickness and middle age. They can hardly be fairly judged apart from their context, so closely are they interwoven with the story, and the love-songs are all in harmony with those who sing them. Of these the songs of Karadan, Phantasmion's rival, are perhaps the most characteristic.

"One face alone, one face alone  
These eyes require;  
But when that longed-for sight is shown,  
What fatal fire  
Shoots through my veins a keen and liquid flame,  
That melts each fibre of my wasting frame.

One voice alone, one voice alone,  
 I pine to hear ;  
 But when its meek mellifluous tone  
 Usurps mine ear,  
 Those slavish chains about my soul are wound  
 Which ne'er till death itself can be unbound.”

Or again :—

“ I tremble when with look benign  
 Thou tak'st my offered hand in thine,  
 Lest passion-breathing words of mine  
 The charm should break ;  
 And friendly smiles be forced to fly,  
 Like soft reflections of the sky,  
 Which when rude gales are sweeping by,  
 Desert the lake.

Of late I saw thee in a dream ;  
 The day-star poured his hottest beam,  
 And thou, a cool refreshing stream,  
 Didst brightly run.  
 The trees where thou wert pleased to flow,  
 Threw out their flowers, a glorious show,  
 While I, too distant doomed to grow,  
 Pined in the sun.”

And another has much felicitous expressiveness, together with what has been called the “ bounding measure ” of the lyrical poetry of the day.

“ I thought by tears thy soul to move  
 Since smiles have proved in vain ;  
 But I from thee no smiles of love  
 Nor tears of pity gain ;

Now, now I could not smile perforce  
A sceptred queen to please ;  
Yet tears will take th' accustomed course  
Till time their fountain freeze.

My life is dedicate to thee,  
My service wholly thine ;  
But what fair fruit can grace the tree  
Till suns vouchsafe to shine ?  
Thou art my sun, thy looks are light,  
O cast me not in shade !  
Beam forth ere summer takes its flight,  
And all my honours fade.

When, torn by sudden gusty flaw,  
The fragile harp lies mute,  
Its tenderest tones the wind can draw  
From many another lute ;  
But when this beating heart lies still,  
Each chord relax'd in death,  
What other shall so deeply thrill,  
So tremble at thy breath ? ”

Her verse is, as a rule, more fluent and much less original than Hartley's. The current of her thought flowed in an ordered channel, whilst his overflowed its banks, now hurried and impetuous, now desultory and impeded in its course. It must be conceded that her poetical faculties were chiefly appreciative and critical, and she laid no claim to more than a natural gift of poetic feeling and facile melodious versification.

## CHAPTER XVII

### HARTLEY'S HAUNTS

Family affection—Hartley's haunts—Wordsworth's and Southey's relations with the peasantry—Hartley's associates—His humour—James Spedding's estimate of Hartley's character—Tennyson's recollections—Visitors to the Lakes—Caroline Fox—Professor Shairp—Sadness at Greta Hall—Mrs. Fletcher—Dr. Arnold—Miss Martineau—De Vere—Miss Fenwick's friendship

“**T**HANK God all my children love one another ;” so Coleridge had written when, in the midst of heavy discouragements, he had sought for one ray of comfort ; and his words were as true as when first uttered, though time and circumstance had kept the two brothers and their sister almost continuously apart. Derwent, first in his country curacy and then in London, was doing responsible work, leaving little leisure at his disposal ; Sara was tied to her home and the care of her children, even if her health had not incapacitated her for long journeys ; and Hartley was more and more the professional though not solitary vagrant clinging to his accustomed haunts.

Here he combined the life of the outlaw and the man of letters. Streams and valleys, the wide lakes and the dark, hidden pools, the lonely mountain tracks, in sunshine or in storm, under the splendour of high

summer moons, or in the frost-bound stillness of starlit nights, had still their old attraction for the wayfarer. He had earned himself a literary reputation, but he took no serious steps to maintain it. He read much and widely; he studied and mastered several modern languages, and took much interest in philosophical and theological questions; but poetry was still the dominating element in his thoughts, though rather a floating inspiration than an art to be cultivated and pursued. With ready adaptability he was equally at home in Wordsworth's study or in the parlour of the "Red Lion Inn." It was an easy transition from discussions upon English literature or Greek dramatists to the merry humours of a sheep-shearing supper; and every man, woman and child throughout the country-side was his friend.

Though Keble, in introducing Wordsworth at Oxford for his D.C.L. degree, asserted that he had "shed a celestial light upon the affections, the occupations and the piety of the poor," as a matter of fact neither he nor Southey were familiar with their poorer neighbours. Though Southey had lived so long at Keswick, very few of the inhabitants were known to him. Partly from shortness of sight, partly from absence of mind, he failed to recognize even those he knew upon the road. He regretted these lapses as likely to be misconstrued, and would turn again, as a tardy recollection flashed upon him, and mechanically lift his cap in a recognition, too late to be of any avail; and it was only with the members of his own household, and with those in his immediate service that he was brought into any familiar contact.



Wordsworth's robust manliness and rustic simplicity especially qualified him to be the Laureate of dalesmen and cottagers; and his reverence for human nature, his habits of close and uncritical observation, and his readily evoked sympathies, enabled him to record with truth and soberness, in exact if somewhat prosaic language, "the short and simple annals of the poor." His practical knowledge of those among whom he dwelt was, however, limited to selected individuals or representative types. He was, in many respects, as incapable of understanding the ordinary modes of thought of uncultivated rustics as they were of setting a value upon his poetry and genius.

Hartley, on the contrary, was a democrat by nature and by creed. At a village wedding or christening he was in his element. He would sit by the hour in a farm-house kitchen, as much at home with the grandmother in the chimney corner as with the infant in the cradle at her feet. The legitimate inmates came in and out and felt his presence no intrusion. "Accustomed to consider men as men," so one of his friends writes, "to him it mattered little to whom he disburthened himself of the load of mental treasure that literally seemed to oppress him and to be ever seeking an utterance." Sheltering from the rain at a wayside inn (not a safe refuge under any circumstances for poor Hartley), he would deliver an impromptu historical lecture to a group of farmers, or enter upon a metaphysical discussion with some chance fellow-guest. No wonder the veneration for his talents throughout the district almost equalled the affection with which he was regarded. Wordsworth was an enigma. His probity, rectitude,

and what Carlyle designated "his solid precision," awakened their respect; but when they met him in a mood of poetic inspiration upon the highway or mountain track, and heard his voice "bumming" away, as they called it, in sonorous recitation, they looked upon him as one outside the range of ordinary understandings. As for his poetry, it had not "a bit of laugh in it," like Hartley's, and was kept over-long in his head. Hartley's was "gaily well liket by a vast of fowk cracking ower a pint of ale." "Cliverest man in England some did say, and did a deal to help Mr. Wudsworth out with his poetry and all."

Such being the popular verdict, it was no wonder one of Hartley's friends could declare that, in his own neighbourhood, Poet Hartley was of more account than Poet Wordsworth.

He lived both literally and metaphorically at Wordsworth's feet, for Nab Cottage, his last abode, lies on the roadside but a stone's throw from Rydal Water and just below the Mount; and he had never lost his youthful reverence for his character and genius. But reverence in Hartley was ever compatible with freaks of irresistible laughter and levity recalling Lamb's account of his own unaccountable and unseasonable hilarity. When Lamb is going to stand godfather (and no one could have been more sincerely impressed with the sacred solemnity of the occasion) he is still impelled to forebode that he will "certainly disgrace the font. I cannot muster up decorum for these occasions. I was at Hazlitt's marriage and had like to have been turned out several times during the ceremony. Anything awful makes me laugh. I misbehaved once at a funeral."

Dora Wordsworth, when Hartley wrote her a complimentary sonnet, might affect to scorn it, and declare that her head would be turned "by daft verses from daft men," but one cannot but feel that the freshness of his fleeting merriment, like a breeze from another world, must have pleasantly enlivened the responsible gravity of the circle at Rydal Mount. When, for instance, he entered by chance upon a family conclave and found them anxiously weighing with due deliberation and neighbourly kindness the poetical efforts of a Mr. Barber at Grasmere, he settled the question at once from his own point of view. "We told him Barber had turned poet, and he should hear some of his verses." "Well," says he, "they are very pretty indeed," and immediately adds his irreverent comment: "But if Barber wrote these verses, I will be shaved dry with a rusty sickle by any barber in Westmoreland."

No one could have looked back with more poignant regret than Hartley to the sorrow he had brought upon his father by his repeated failures and their results. After Coleridge's death this regret was painfully intensified, and yet when he fell through the loose seat of a chair upon which he was standing to take some books from a shelf his first exclamation was, "I wish my poor father could see me now. He always said I could get through nothing. At all events I am clean through this chair."

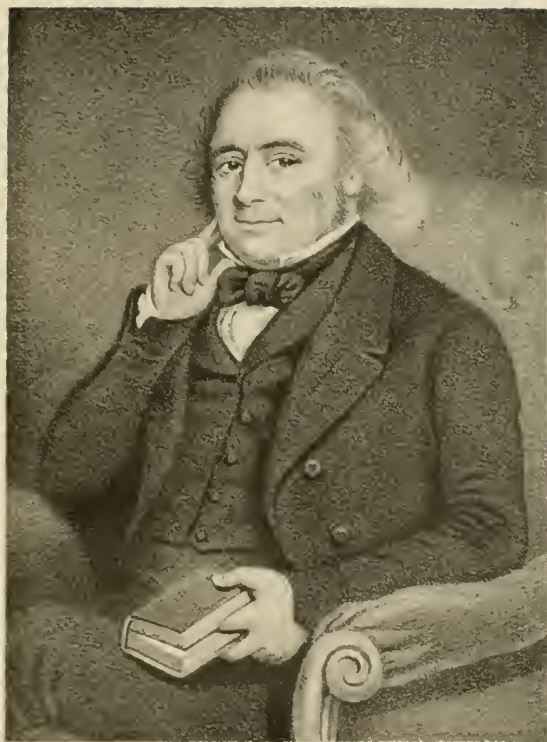
The light sparks of his humour, blown about in every wind, his quick repartees, the illumination dying down at once in its own embers, recalls Hazlitt's dictum upon Charles Lamb that "his talk was like snap-dragon."

It could never have been said of Hartley "Look! he's winding up the watch of his wit, by and by it will strike." Easy and unpremeditated, his jests, like those of the court fool, were ready for all occasions, but they were not of a quality to be separated from their context or put down on paper. Coleridge indeed declared there was a "flat-sharpness" in Hartley's conversation he had not inherited from him, he must have caught it from Southey. It was undoubtedly from his father he had inherited the roll and volume of sound, and the fluency of his words; though his desire to overleap all restraining conventional barriers, both in deed and word, was distinctively his own.

Tennyson, who, on a visit to the Lake district, found him "wonderfully eloquent, a lovable little fellow," used to tell a story of his behaviour at the house of a stiff Presbyterian minister, exemplifying the difficulty he experienced in preserving his decorum under formal and uncongenial circumstances. "There was a long waiting for dinner in the drawing-room. Nobody talked. At last Hartley could stand it no longer. He jumped up from the sofa, kissed the clergyman's daughter and bolted out of the house."

But though he might easily, if not inevitably, offend, when social codes or obligations were in question, it was not only those most nearly related to him who could bear testimony to the fact that his purity of mind remained untarnished by the error of his ways.

James Spedding's language upon this point is most explicit. "One very strong impression with which I always came away from him may be worth mentioning; I mean that his moral and spiritual sensibilities seemed



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to be untouched by the life he was leading . . . His way of life seemed in some things destructive of self-respect, and was certainly regarded by himself with a feeling of shame, which in his seasons of self-communion became passionate; and yet it did not at all degrade his mind. It left not his understanding only, but also his imagination and feelings, perfectly healthy—free, fresh, and pure. His language might be sometimes what some people would call gross, but that I think was not from any want of true delicacy, but from a masculine disdain of any false delicacy; and his opinion, judgments and speculations were in the highest degree refined and elevated—full of chivalrous generosity, and purity and manly tenderness. Such at least was my invariable impression. It always surprised me, but fresh observations always confirmed it.” And this it must be remembered was the verdict of one whose high-minded sincerity and generosity was supplemented by the trained appreciation of the scholar.

Nor was Tennyson the only visitor to the Lakes who found him both interesting and lovable. To Caroline Fox in 1837 he “unfolded on many things in a tone well worthy of a poet’s son.” He could not recollect his own poetry so as to repeat it, but he spoke much of Wordsworth and thought that “his peculiar beauty consists in viewing things as amongst them, mixing himself up with everything that he mentions, so that you admire the Man in the thing—the involved Man. . . . He calls him more a man of genius than of talent, for whilst the fit of inspiration lasts he is every inch a poet; when he tries to write without it he is very dragging. He thinks intellect is now of a more diffusive character than it

was fifty years ago, for progressive it cannot be—there must ever be this distinction between intellect and talent. He must have a large share of combativeness and he will never admit of your meeting him half-way—if you attempt it he is instantly off on a tangent. So we idly talked and idly listened.”

Yet even in the midst of these easy variations of talk another note was now and again struck revealing something of the “essential melancholy of a comedian.” When it was asked if Wordsworth’s daughter had inherited any of her father’s genius, there came the quick interrogation, “Would you have the disease of genius to descend like the scrofula?” And when he took the party to his rose-covered cottage, and, looking round his little room well furnished with books, some one, perhaps a little sentimentally, exclaimed, “One might be very happy here.” “Or *very miserable*,” he answered, with sad and terrible emphasis.

Caroline Fox, too, dwells upon the vivid brilliancy of his talk, his strange flitting movements and spontaneous humour. When he spoke to her of the Arnolds as a gifted family and was asked how they had been educated, he rose from the table and cried, “Why, they were suckled on Latin and weaned upon Greek.”

There were also many other casual visitors to the Lakes who were attracted by his personality and likewise formed the highest opinion of his intellectual endowments. He gladly availed himself of the ready admission accorded to him into cultivated society, where he took his place without any false humility. James Spedding, whose wise and discriminating judgment could not have been misled by any superficial

accomplishments, not only gave the striking testimony already quoted as to his character, but also commended him to Moxon for his last half-completed literary venture, the *Lives of Massinger and Ford* ; and Lockhart thought so highly of his powers that he supposed him to be the author of Southey's "Doctor."

Professor Shairp, of St. Andrew's, and Arthur Clough, both in their several ways wide as the poles asunder from any natural affinity with his peculiar disposition and gifts, yet drew him into the circle of their reading party to hear him roll forth his thoughts on poetry, philosophy, life, and all high things. They could not but be aware that, as Shairp expressed it, his habits had been the bane of his life, and it was lamentable to see such genius so trampled under foot ; but his discourse was wonderful, and when he talked of Shakespeare Shairp found it worth all the commentaries and essays on him that had ever been written. He was persuaded Hartley might have done anything in the way of literature that he pleased.

The gladness had departed from Greta Hall. Southey's wife had lost her senses in 1835, and in pathetic and prophetic language, in a letter to Sir Robert Peel declining the baronetage offered, he had written, "that broken sleep and anxious thoughts, from which there is no escape in the night season, have made me feel how more than possible it is that a sudden stroke may deprive me of those faculties by the exercise of which this poor family has hitherto been supported." There were, however, many other houses in the neighbourhood open to Hartley, and the strange apparition of the wanderer crossed the bewildered vision of visitors to the Lakes

and was a familiar presence in domestic circles where it might have been supposed he would not have found himself at home.

Mrs. Fletcher, the widow of a Scotch Whig reforming barrister, formerly renowned in Edinburgh for her beauty, her abilities, and conversational powers, and better known to posterity by her delightful autobiography, had come in her old age with her daughter to settle at Lancrigg. She had been intimate with Jeffrey, Horner, and Brougham, was proud to number Mazzini amongst her friends, and though out of respect for the old poet she avoided political topics at Rydal Mount, still retained her free opinions and delighted to discuss them with kindred spirits. Hartley Coleridge often went in to share her early dinner, and "with his gentle oddity and large range of contemplation over his own thoughts, always added something to our stock of ideas by these wandering visits. We never made out whether he liked us or not, but we always made him welcome."

At Fox How Hartley was equally welcome, and had an admiring affection for Dr. Arnold. As a teacher, he regarded him as charged with a high and perilous mission, and one moreover which, to Hartley's mind, could never be dissociated from the pangs of martyrdom. Dr. Arnold had, in his opinion, well earned its crown. It was of Arnold that he wrote :—

"In him was Jesus crucified again ;  
For every sin which he could not prevent  
Stuck in him like a nail. His heart bled for it  
As it had been a foul sin of his own.  
Heavy his cross, and stoutly did he bear it,  
Even to the foot of holy Calvary ;



And if at last he sunk beneath the weight,  
There were not wanting souls whom he had taught  
The way to Paradise, that, in white robes  
Thronged to the gate to hail their shepherd home."

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Miss Martineau, even in her schoolroom fiction the exponent of the highest moral precepts, and now, in her home at Ambleside, turning domestic virtues to practical account, not merely in the strict regulation of her household but in her model cowsheds, dairy, and pigsties, could hardly have had time or patience to decipher the wavering lines of Hartley's character, yet she too was melted into pity when he died; excuses for his conduct rose unbidden to her lips, and her heart, for once, played the traitor to her principles.

Aubrey de Vere, whose eager alacrity to plead excuses and discover extenuating circumstances might have seemed to those who knew him but superficially to be curiously combined with the extreme of ultramontane beliefs, saw in Hartley Coleridge—that "strange, interesting, forlorn being, one who might have been more easily changed into an angel than into a simply strong man." And in the pursuit of charity, in this instance, at least, he lighted upon a hidden truth.

He found everything Hartley said "strange and quaint though perfectly unaffected, always amusing yet always representing a mind whose thoughts dwelt in regions as remote as the antipodes. . . . There was also a great tenderness of nature about him, and he would not allow his MSS. to be taken out of his hand because many of them were written by friends now dead. His bearing had lost none of its natural refinement, though

he had often associated with the rougher classes. His nature was plainly one of singular sweetness, yet there must have been a vein of bitterness in it also, or he could not have addressed that sonnet to his father which contains the line : 'Thy prayer was heard—I wandered as a breeze.'"

Here de Vere seems to have missed the distinction between a regretful melancholy and the bitterness of spirit which casts the burden of responsibility upon another. There was no gall in Hartley's cup of sorrow, and the springs of lovingkindness were never poisoned by a desire to reproach or retaliate.

In his "Recollections" Aubrey de Vere, like other of his acquaintance, refers to the humour intersecting Hartley's profoundest moods of sadness, and relates that upon one occasion, being asked to meet an Irish enthusiast who went about the country enlightening people's minds on the subject of popish errors, Hartley after dinner asked to be presented to the lecturer ; and taking his arm whilst the guests were gathered round, he addressed him with solemnity : "Sir, there are two great evils in Ireland." "There are indeed," replied the Irish guest ; "but please to name them." "The first," Hartley resumed, "is popery." "It is," cried the other in emphatic acquiescence. "How wonderful you should have discovered it ! Now what is the second great evil ?" "*Protestantism*," was Hartley's reply in a voice of thunder, as he ran away screaming with laughter.

Even to those who took the justest and gravest views of his wasted life, it cannot have been unwelcome to see its sadness now and again relieved by the irrepressible gaiety of a child.

Whilst at Sedbergh no sense of professional dignity could restrain him from frequenting the travelling shows as they passed through the village ; and he always had an especial predilection for the company of strolling players. Nevertheless, his greatest friends were those who, like the Wordsworths, lived in the highest regions, impressed, though not overshadowed, by an ever-present sense of the momentous issues of life and character.

One amongst these friends (whose honoured name can never be dissociated from the poets and dwellers at the Lakes) was especially fitted, if such a task had lain within the bounds of human possibility, to guide and enlighten his uncertain course.

Miss Isabella Fenwick, the cousin of Henry Taylor (so much the household friend of the Wordsworths that her photograph from a drawing by Watts still hangs amongst the family portraits at Dove Cottage), was eager to extend to him the compassionate interest which, in spite of some elements of sternness in her nature and peculiar characteristics of moral elevation, she was ever ready to bestow upon the publican. She had, so her cousin affirmed, some want of toleration for what after all in a just estimate is tolerable enough—prudential virtue and worldly respectability. Her theory was that the great sinners are, through remorse and repentance, more in the way to salvation than the indifferently conducted people ; and Hartley had clearly no prudence or worldly wisdom to oppose as a bar to her friendship. A friend also of his sister's, she was a connecting link between them. Her life amidst much physical suffering and mental depression was one of love and beneficence, and until Hartley's death she never

ceased to present to him the strong inspiration of her own faith and courage.

And here again, in strong corroboration of the testimony of his friends, another paragraph from Carpenter's "Mental Physiology" must be quoted: "Cases like that of Hartley Coleridge, in which it (intoxication) seems only to excite the higher part of the Intellectual and Moral nature to an irregular activity, are extremely rare."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SARA'S MARRIED LIFE

Removal to Regent's Park—Conversational powers—Henry Taylor's recollections—The art of letter-writing—Self-control and unworldliness—Professor Reed's opinion of Sara Coleridge's intellectual powers—Headings of letters—Coleridge's remains—Chaucer and Dryden—Mrs. Hemans—Dr. Chalmers—Discipline of children—Correspondence with Hartley—Their relations with one another—His sonnet on the death of her children—Henry Coleridge's death

**I**N 1837 the Henry Coleridges, with larger means at their disposal, were able to move into a more commodious house—10, Chester Place, Regent's Park. Here it was easier to receive and entertain the friends they had gathered about them, and in the first decades of the nineteenth century no one grudged time spent in long morning visits, discussing, not merely the current topics of the day, but many other subjects of mutual interest; and even in London people found "leisure to be wise."

Thoughtful and serene, Mrs. Coleridge had an especial attraction for those to whom the expression of serious convictions and matured judgments upon literary, social, and religious questions was of more importance than superficial brilliancy or the quick flash of repartee. The languor of ill-health still subdued, though it could not



quench, the ardour of her spirit. By sustained force of her own moral and spiritual rectitude she led her hearers on by a gradual ascent to the heights whereon she dwelt, extending to those beneath the calm, if occasionally indifferent, indulgence of a magnanimous mind.

Henry Taylor gives a description of her in young middle life, after her widowhood, that in all probability conveys a very true impression of the effect she produced upon comparative strangers. "Her beauty though not lost was impaired, and with the same stillness and absolute simplicity which belonged to her nature there was some sadness which I had not seen before in the expression of her face, and some shyness of manner. I think I was myself shy and this perhaps made her so, and the effect was to shut me out from the knowledge *by conversation* of almost any part of her mind and nature except her intellect. For whenever she was shy, if she could not be silent, which was impossible when we were alone together, she fled into the region where she was most at home and at ease, which was of psychological and abstract thought; and this was the region where I was by no means at ease and at home. Had we met more frequently (and I never cease to wish that we had) no doubt these little difficulties would soon have been surmounted; and we should have got into the fields of thought and sentiment which had an interest common to us both. . . . I only know that the admirable strength and subtlety of her reasoning faculty, shown in her writings and conversation, were less to me than the beauty and simplicity and feminine tenderness of her face; and that one or two casual and



SARA COLERIDGE

FROM THE DRAWING BY GEORGE RICHMOND, R.A.



transitory expressions of her nature in her countenance, delightful in their poetic power, have come back to me from time to time, and that they are present with me now, when much of what was most to be admired in her intellectual achievements or discourse have passed away."

The element of sadness in her looks and speech was doubtless more evident after her bereavement; yet it had always been the almost necessary accompaniment of high ideals unremittingly pursued, and yet hardly to be attained amongst adverse circumstances and the disenchanting realities of an alien world. She was silenced, though not disconcerted, by an uncongenial companion, and, unlike most women, demanded intellectual rather than purely human fellowship. Like some other naturally reticent persons, she found it easier to be unreserved in letters than in speech. The reason is not far to seek. When face to face the barrier erected against undesired intruders may be broken down suddenly and unawares, and friends may rush in where angels fear to tread, but in a letter, you may if you so desire it set wide the door without fear of immediate consequences. Moreover, it is easier to choose a correspondent than an interlocutor. And yet, whilst in some respects unreserved, Mrs. Henry Coleridge's domestic letters, without being in the least degree artificial, have an air of cultivated premeditation. They forcibly remind one of her own observations in the Appendix to the "*Biographia Literaria*":—

"There are many very delightful domestic letters which are quite unfit for publication, and on the other hand many letters fit for the public eye have been

written, like those of Cowper, to friends. In general it may be said that men of genius, especially if their intellectual powers have been cultivated, are apt to rise above mere home wits and wisdom ; even when they are speaking of home matters, they seldom treat details and particulars merely as such, but quickly bring them into the light of general principles and truths ; and even in their chamber are fit to go abroad into the streets—nay, fitter sometimes than if they had dressed themselves for a public entertainment.”

To quote Oliver Wendell Holmes's description of a character as applicable to Sara Coleridge, and say that “Nature had written out her virtues on ruled paper, and forgotten to rub out the lines,” might convey in some respects an incorrect impression ; at the same time the order and symmetry in her thoughts and modes of utterance produced an effect of formality upon less well-regulated minds. Self-control was not only a habit but an instinct. The construction and finish of her sentences ; the distinction conscientiously preserved (so often lost sight of in the heat of argument) between fact and fiction ; the absence of exaggeration of feeling, the modest yet confident equipoise of her understanding ; the clear line drawn between opinions and convictions whether in herself or others ; the refusal to throw any light which might be misleading in order to give effect to an assertion or colour to an argument ; the profound sense of responsibility in the ordinary actions and events of life, must be acknowledged to be qualities rarely combined with the quick sympathies and tender sensibilities which are essentially feminine.

One characteristic she shared with Hartley was an



absolute indifference to purely worldly standards and worldly ambitions. The approving appreciation of a friend was of far greater value than the acclamations of a crowd. Her unusual gifts were gladly used to expound, adapt, criticize, or interpret the minds and works of others. She had no desire to attain celebrity by a creative exercise of her intellectual powers. In her only long original work they were employed in the children's service.

Her other most important writings were such as to appeal only to a select circle of readers. The most noteworthy are the *Essay on Rationalism*, with an application to the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration, appended to Vol. II. of "*Aids to Reflection*"; the Introduction to the "*Biographia Literaria*"; and a Preface to her father's political writings—"Essays on his own Times," by S. T. Coleridge—which contains, in Professor Reed's opinion, the "most judicious and impartial comparison between British and American civilization, and the social and intellectual conditions of the two countries, that has yet been written. . . . There have been expended in the desultory form of notes, and appendices, and prefaces, an amount of original thought and an affluence of learning, which, differently and more prominently presented, would have made her famous. There is not one woman in a thousand, not one man in ten thousand, who would have been thus prodigal of the means of celebrity."

We may dissent from the estimation formed of masculine and feminine ambitions, and may yet readily acknowledge that both in Sara Coleridge's writings and in her intercourse with others, there was never any

sort of desire to exact admiration or achieve a cheap popularity. The prodigal exercise of her intellectual powers, to which Professor Reed refers, is chiefly manifested in letters to relations and intimate friends.

One peculiarity of these letters certainly consists in the wide range of subjects, and the manner in which the ordinary circumstances and conditions of life are connected by perfectly natural trains of thought with matters of vital and permanent concern. The nature of the themes discussed is perhaps most noticeable in letters to her husband, when the very closeness of the tie and other mutual and absorbing interests, might have possibly banished abstract or abstruse questions from the correspondence. Such is not the case. Chaucer's poetry—Note on Enthusiasm—False Etymologies—Authority of Criticism—The Judicial Faculty as much a part of the Human Mind as the Inventive Faculty—The Linnæan System : such are some of the headings taken haphazard of these the most intimate of all letters.

They are frequently interspersed with comments and criticisms upon authors whose works, whether classical or modern, philosophical or poetical, light or grave, were all alike explored by her inquiring spirit. Here, for instance, is a dispassionate note on Coleridge's "Remains" (now published as *Lectures on Shakespeare, etc* ; *Notes on English Divines* ; *Notes Theological, Political, etc.*) : "It does not seem as if the writer was especially conversant with this or that, as Babbage with mechanics and Mill with political economy ; but as if there was a subtle imaginative spirit to search and illustrate all subjects that interest

humanity. Sir J. Mackintosh said that 'S. T. C. trusted to his ingenuity to atone for his ignorance.' But in such subjects as my father treats of, ingenuity is the best knowledge."

When contrasting Dryden and Chaucer she writes: "Dryden's fables are certainly an ideal of the rapid compressed manner, each line packed with as much meaning as possible. But Dryden's imagination was fertile and energetic rather than grand or subtle; and he is more deficient in tenderness than any poet of his capacity that I am acquainted with. His English style is animated and decorous, full of picture words, but too progressive for elaborate metaphors. . . . The sly satire of old Chaucer suited his genius; but there is a simple pathos at times in the old writer which is alien to Dryden's mind. Chaucer jested upon women like a laughing philosopher; Dryden like a disappointed husband."

Take again another discerning criticism on Felicia Hemans, who, dying in the same year as Coleridge, had been commemorated in Wordsworth's extempore effusion—

"Mourn rather for that holy Spirit  
Sweet as the spring, as ocean deep;  
For Her, who, ere her summer faded,  
Has sunk into a breathless sleep,"

and whose wide popularity had received the high sanction and seal of the most distinguished of her literary contemporaries. "The poet," Mrs. Coleridge writes, "does not *create* out of nothing; but his mind so acts on the things of the universe, material or imma-

terial, that each composition is in effect a new creation. Many of Mrs. Hemans' poems are not even in this sense creations; she takes a theme, and this she illustrates in fifty different ways, the verses being like so many wafers in blue, green, red, yellow. She takes descriptions from books of natural history or travel, puts them into verse, and appends a sentiment or moral, like the large bead of a rosary at the end of several white ones. But all these materials have undergone no fusion in the crucible of imagination."

Then in a lighter vein, in reference to a more serious work—Chalmers's "Bridgewater Treatise": "when the wordy Doctor does get hold of an argument, what a sputter does he make with it for dozens of pages. He is like a child with a new wax doll, he hugs it, holds it up to be admired, puts it on a pink gown, puts it on a blue gown, ties it on a yellow sash; then pretends to take it to task, chatters at it, shakes it, and whips it; tells it not to be so proud of its fine false ringlets, which can be all cut off in a minute, then takes it into favour again; and at last, to the relief of all the company, puts it to bed."

When she wrote upon abstract or ethical subjects there are constant evidences of quick intuitions as well as of reflective powers. "Anger," she observes, "will talk much and strongly, but not so fancifully as love or grief; it stems the fancy by its violence, and those passions which, like revenge, impel to action, employ the energies in another way. As a watery mirror shaken by the wind presents only the confused fragments of a picture, the mind agitated by vehement anger reflects no continuous imagery, like sorrow which is still and

meditative. . . . Scorn argues self-possession ; a man in a passion cannot scorn."

And as an example of practical wisdom, she records the rule she has laid down for herself in the management of children : never to draw upon their sensibility, "or try to *create* what must be a native impulse if genuine ; neither would I *appeal* to what is so unsure a ground of action. I would not tell a child to refrain from what is wrong because it *gives me pain*. I know from experience how soon that falls flat on the feelings, and how can you expect sympathy when there can be no experience or conception of the evil suffered? . . . Nothing is more sure to disgust than a demand for sympathy where there is a lack of all materials for its production. How can a child comprehend a grown person's bodily sensations or parental grief and anxieties?"

Many of these letters are addressed to Hartley, There was evidently an anxious desire on each side to preserve an inter-communion of ideas and feelings ; though it was only through the affections it could be accomplished.

The dissimilarity of circumstances need not in themselves have interposed an insurmountable barrier. His haunts and many of his friends and associates were as well known to his sister as to himself. The busy regularity of a professional man's family life and the ways of London drawing-rooms would have been strange and unaccustomed, and yet one might imagine Hartley straying for awhile into the happy circle, and, like a beneficent household spirit, taking up his abode for awhile upon the hearth. But the very depth of his admiring reverence for his sister set her



at a distance. Upon that distance imagination might shed a cheering, softening light, but it could not diminish it. At intervals we find her recording little traits or anecdotes of her children for his benefit, eagerly responding to an advance on his part, or discussing some problem he has raised, and still the real intimacy which has no need of words could never be theirs. Its absence might be ignored or even unperceived, but nothing else could take its place.

Nevertheless, at the turning-points in life Hartley, with a sort of affectionate loyalty, at once participated in her joys and sorrows. At the time of his father's death, and in 1845 when his mother died, he at once put himself into communication with her. When she lost her twin babies it was to them he addressed one of his most beautiful sonnets :—

“But born to die, they just had felt the air,  
When God revoked the mandate of their doom,  
A brief imprisonment within the womb  
Of human life was all but all their share.  
Two whiter souls unstained with sin or care  
Shall never blossom from the fertile tomb ;—  
Twin flowers that wasted not on earth their bloom,  
So quickly Heaven reclaimed the spotless pair.  
Let man that on his own desert relies,  
And deems himself the creditor of God,  
Think how these babes have earned their paradise ;  
How small the work of their small period :  
Their very cradle was the hopeful grave,  
God only made them for His Christ to save.”

When she writes to him after her husband's death she speaks of the difficulty she experiences in entering upon

the subject. She finds it comparatively easy with others less nearly connected with her; but the sense of his sympathy awakens a crowd of strong emotions. He had seen little of her husband; he was at a distance from her; he knew nothing of the supremacy and bonds of marriage; but he loves and therefore he understands.

It was at the close of the happiest decade in their lives that the unforeseen blow fell upon Henry and Sara Coleridge. Her health had always given some cause for anxiety, but after the removal to Chester Place in 1837 there was less physical and nervous prostration. The two children were full of health and promise. Her husband was successfully engaged in worthy work; prospects were lightening all around them. No man could have more signally united a happy temperament and elasticity of mind and spirit with the possession of everything in life he most desired. Then in midday there was a sudden darkening of the skies above his head—a presentiment of danger; he knew himself to be the victim of an incurable disease, and after a few months of weakness and suffering he died of spinal paralysis on 26 January, 1843.

Already in 1840, during an absence from her husband, Mrs. Henry Coleridge had written about her own outlook upon the world around her as altered from what it had been in the days of youth, when the world seemed to be clothed in “fast colours.” What was light had become dimmer, and wholly new features had come forth on the landscape which connected this earth with the quiet of the sky. Now as she parted from him on the threshold of that other world, the gates were set

yet wider. Already, before the end came, she had been able to feel that if she could arrest his departure by a prayer she would not utter it ; and when all was over she struggled as she wrote against stagnation of spirit and dull, motionless brooding on her loss, though she could not but share the experience of other mourners, that the heaviest hours are those when we must perforce return to meet the ordinary exigencies of daily life.

## CHAPTER XIX

### FRIENDSHIP WITH AUBREY DE VERE

Early widowhood—Theological interests—Intercourse with Aubrey de Vere—His personality—De Vere's description of Mrs. Coleridge—Sara Coleridge's estimate of de Vere—Their discussions and differences—The Tractarian Movement—Position of parties—Mrs. Coleridge's religious views—Dr. Pusey's preaching—Diverging paths

SARA COLERIDGE'S happiness in her married life had never been of a tempestuous character. "Gradually and painfully," as she wrote, the closest of all ties had been cut asunder, and the final blow fell upon a heart prepared by long years of self-discipline to meet it with faith and courage. "I thank God and the power of His grace," she writes, "that there has been no agony in my grief, there has been no struggle of my soul with Him. I have always had such a strong sense and conviction that if this sorrow *was to be*, and was appointed by God, it was entirely right, and that it was mere senselessness to wish anything otherwise than as infinite goodness and infinite wisdom had ordained it."

She could believe Aubrey de Vere's assertion, that "In our saddest times the Angel of God is moving on before us and we are clinging to his skirts; what we

think the tempest is really but the speed of his onward movement."

Bearing the burden of an undivided responsibility and constantly suffering from physical weakness, she yet set herself for her children's sake to take her part not only in life's duties, but in its pleasures. In general society there was, however, a sense of weariness and effort. Her spirits flagged, and strangers experienced in her presence some shyness and constraint, rather heightened than diminished by the sedate gentleness of her speech and manners. In the company of intimate friends, however, her mind was ever at "leisure from itself," receptive, sympathetic, prepared with renewed mental energy to attempt the solution of the most difficult problems in the regions of theological inquiry and speculative thought.

Though clinging to the friends of her childhood, and all the tenderest bonds of kindred, she had time to give to those who shared her interest in the subjects that had quickened her intellectual powers in youth. Misfortune had enhanced their importance, and their discussion both in letters and conversation was a not infrequent refuge from domestic cares or necessary anxieties, and the ever-present pressure of an irremediable loss.

Amongst such friends Aubrey de Vere took the foremost place, and it is impossible to imagine any one better fitted to supply precisely those qualities her own nature, unconsciously but none the less imperatively, demanded in a friend.

With the deep seriousness of a spirit to whom the things of eternity were as present and more real than those of time, he united an untroubled gaiety of heart,



a perennial spring of hope the experience of life had had no power to exhaust. No fierce midday heats had banished the freshness of the morning, no disillusionments had cast more than a transitory shadow upon its brightness. How many might not have echoed Coventry Patmore's words, "Do you not remember how he looked like sunshine when he came to see us?"

In the seclusion of his Irish country home, Curragh Chase, Adare, his poetic instincts and religious aspirations had been nurtured and strengthened in a region of meditative peace. No dust from life's highways had obscured his spiritual vision, and religion had been ever the motive power of his blameless life and an inexhaustible source of contemplative thought.

His acquaintance with Mrs. Henry Coleridge began in 1841, about eighteen months before her husband's death, when he wrote of her as one hardly less interesting to him than Wordsworth, to whom he became known in the same year. "She is a most singularly beautiful as well as attractive person . . . a brow that puts you in mind of 'the rapt one of the God-like forehead,' and an air of intellect and sweetness all the more interesting from being shadowed over by the languor of pain—her health is very indifferent. We have had some delightful conversations about poetry and art, and she seems always glad to talk of her father."

That in itself would have constituted a strong bond of union. The "depth and vastness" of Coleridge's philosophy had, from de Vere's youth, obtained so strong a hold upon his mind that he classed him with Bacon and St. Thomas Aquinas as one of the three great teachers who had informed his understanding and

formulated his beliefs. "Since the days of Orpheus there was never such philosophic poetry as he might have given us if his bark had not been blown away from the fortunate 'Islands of the Muses.'"

And in another letter, in 1848, after visiting his grave : "I have been on a pilgrimage to the tomb of that grand old mystical bard and seer, Coleridge, a man to whom I give more of love and admiration than I generally give to writers and whose works have had more influence on the formation of my own opinions than those of any one else."

It was therefore a great happiness to find in his daughter one whom he could meet upon terms of most sympathetic and affectionate regard, in whose society he could ascend to realms of metaphysical research, or with whom he could discuss even more absorbing questions of theoretical and practical theology.

There was, moreover, another attraction in their mutual realization of the truest and highest functions of poetry itself. Its genius was a dominating influence shedding its glorifying light over the mysteries of the present and the records of the past.

In 1845, when he was again in London, he renewed his intercourse with Mrs. Coleridge upon closer and even more familiar terms. There are constant references in his diary and letters to their meetings and conversations. They went together to Mr. Dodsworth's church in Albany Street, and heard Dr. Pusey "preach a sermon like the reverie of a saint." They read his own poems together ; he wrote sonnets for her, which she corrected and criticized, and when she sent back the copy of his poem "*Proserpine*," annotated, he found



SARA COLERIDGE'S DAUGHTER EDITH  
FROM THE DRAWING BY GEORGE RICHMOND, R.A.



some of her observations "very sad, some mirthful, all familiar and interesting." Coleridge's daughter, it is clear, might freely comment on a poet's work without affronting his susceptibilities. She sent him her father's poems enriched by her notes; a very powerful and able critique on "*Laodamia*," some letters of sisterly counsel, and offered him, with "timid intrepidity," her other notes upon Wordsworth. When his visit to London came to an end he made her a characteristic parting present of a volume of Keats's *Poems* and Thomas à Kempis's "*Imitation of Christ*."

His discerning and intimate knowledge of her character has fortunately been preserved in a letter written, soon after her death, to her daughter Edith, who was preparing a portion of her letters for publication:—

"To those who knew her she remains an image of grace and intellectual beauty that time can never tarnish. Her correspondence will, to thoughtful readers, convey a clearer impression than aught besides could convey of one who of course could only be fully understood by those who had known her personally and had known her long.

"In their memories she will ever possess a place apart from all others. With all her high literary powers she was utterly unlike the mass of those who are called literary persons. Few have possessed such learning; and when one calls to mind the arduous character of those studies which seemed but a refreshment to her clear intellect, like a walk in mountain air, it seems a marvel how a woman's faculties could have grappled with those Greek philosophers and Greek fathers. . . .



Her great characteristic was the radiant spirituality of her intellectual and imaginative being. This it was which looked forth from her countenance. . . . She was one of those whose thoughts are growing while they speak, and never speak to surprise. Her intellectual fervour was not that that runs over in excitement; a quietude belonged to it, and it was ever modulated by a womanly instinct of reserve and dignity. . . . She was more a woman than those who had not the tenth part of her intellectual energy. The seriousness and the softness of her nature raised her above vanity and its contortions. Her mind could move at once and be at rest. . . . There will always be those whose discernment can trace in your mother's correspondence and in her works the impress of what once was so fair. But, alas! how little will be known of her even by such. Something they will guess of her mind, but it is only a more fortunate few who can know her yet higher gifts, those which belong to the heart and moral being. If they have a loss which is theirs only, they too have remembrances which none can share with them. They remember the wide sympathies and high aspirations, the courageous love of Knowledge, and the devout submission to Revealed Truth; the domestic affections so tender, so dutiful, and so self-sacrificing, the friendships so faithful and unexacting. For her great things and little lived on together through the fidelity of a heart that seemed never to forget."

Such is the obituary record of a friendship characterized by Mr. de Vere's biographer as the most "ideal friendship" of his life. He found her wearied and

worn and proffered solace and refreshment with the spontaneous cheerfulness of one who knew as little of levity as of gloom. She declared his disposition was to aggrandize and glorify, and that he lived in a "potential world." From this world no one indeed would have wished to recall him; and his capability for looking at the realities of life through a sunshiny mist, was possibly one reason for her assertion that he was the most entire poet she had ever known.

"I have lived among poets a great deal and have known greater poets than he is, but a more entire poet, one more a poet in his whole mind and temperament, I never knew nor met with. . . . He is all simplicity, and yet graceful, and so gracious; sportive and jestful, yet with a depth of seriousness in his nature ever present."

Moreover, his light and tender touch could not aggravate her pain. He was alike at home in the houses of joy and mourning; and she could speak to him of her sorrows and trials with less restraint than to those who, by reason of closer relationships, already shared the burden of her individual loss.

In 1845 death again visited her home and left her more lonely than before. Her mother died suddenly in September; and Aubrey de Vere's diary records that a fortnight after the event, immediately on his return from abroad, he called upon her and was "sitting nearly in the dark except for two faint candles when the door opened and she came in. . . . She was very pale, nervous and tearful. She spoke much of her mother, but smiled more than once before I went away. Her eyes looked

brighter than ever, and I never found her more interesting or gentle."

Her mother's loss was one to leave a wide blank in her life. "The death of my mother," she writes to Mrs. Henry Taylor, "permanently affects my happiness, even more than I should have anticipated. I always knew that I must feel the separation at first as a severe wrench. But I did not apprehend during her life to what a degree she prevented me from feeling heart-solitude. She had a host of common remembrances with me and interests to which my children are strangers."

Mrs. Coleridge had also been constantly dependent upon her daughter's care, and an unnatural stillness had succeeded to the demands with which it had been her happiness to comply.

Friendship and sympathy were more to her than before, and the "moral sunshine" of Aubrey de Vere's presence did much to lighten the oppression of a recent bereavement. His bark rode buoyantly upon troubled waters, and the spirits he evoked were most often, as he himself affirmed, "spirits of noonday."

No two minds could have more freely interchanged reciprocal thoughts and feelings, yet upon theological and ecclesiastical questions there were, in spite of much sincere agreement, certain elements of dissension. Such questions were not at this period relegated to the study or the pulpit. They were forcing themselves both in their concrete and abstract form upon the attention of politicians and undergraduates, of men of action and men of the world. The spirit of controversy had broken loose from antiquated restraints. The most

sacred names had been made party watchwords, and leaders on both sides were more harassed by the defections or rashness of their adherents than by the onslaughts of open foes. It was the high tide of the Tractarian Movement; and the authority of the Church, with its accepted traditions and great historic past, was vindicated by men whose serious sense of momentous issues at stake forbade the display of bewildering rhetoric or irresponsible eloquence. To these the Babel of prejudice and private judgment was as distasteful as it was to Aubrey de Vere himself, who complained that at Cambridge he had chanced upon disputants who "were playing with theories and making thoughts go through evolutions like troops at a review."

Mrs. Coleridge's acquaintance with the records of the early and mediæval Church was as wide as his own, though she was less exclusively occupied by the problems of the day, and by reason of her sex and position at a distance from the battle-field.

With the exception of Mr. Dodsworth, whose church she attended, she had no personal knowledge of the men whose names were in every one's mouths as champions for the truth, or traitors in the camp; whereas de Vere was constantly (in the midst of his multitudinous and very varied social engagements) spending long hours in the discussion of ecclesiastical topics with those to whom he looked as bearing a high commission to guide and defend the bark of the Anglican Church, now tossing upon troubled waters.

Events were crowding fast upon one another. Glad anticipations had given place to gloomy forebodings, and to many the uncertainty of the justice of their cause had

proved more disheartening than actual defeat. Enthusiasm had been kindled in an adverse wind, and it was not to be extinguished by harsh judgments and episcopal censures ; but, amongst bewildering stormlights, some who had set out upon the quest for truth had stumbled or turned aside. Perplexities and anxieties weighed heavily upon the leaders, and even obscured, in some instances, the paramount importance of vital issues.

De Vere had never been enrolled as a member of the Oxford school of theologians, but he revered their principles and shared their hopes. Dr. Pusey had an especial attraction for him, and he was also, in 1845-46, in frequent communication with Manning, Upton Richards, of Margaret Street Chapel (as All Saints, Margaret Street, was then called), Mr. Oakeley, and many other prominent Tractarians, some of whom were among the first to join the Roman Communion.

Already, in 1841, as Newman wrote, "a new school of thought was rising, as is usual in doctrinal inquiries, and was sweeping the original party of the movement aside, and was taking its place. They knew nothing of the *Via Media*, and had heard much about Rome."

In 1845 the temper of the times in religious circles was one of almost unparalleled excitement, and even those whose hold upon Christian verities and the doctrines of the Church was most tenacious were clinging to an anchor in the midst of a storm. "The Lives of the Saints," "The Tracts for the Times," and W. G. Ward's "Ideal Church," which was condemned in the spring of this year, might almost have been designated as popular literature, so loud had been many ill-instructed voices in their praise or condemnation.



Newman's secession was already a foregone conclusion, and the withdrawal into opposite camps of men of equally irreproachable integrity, acknowledged mental powers, and saintliness of life and character, was filling the hearts of many waverers with perplexed disquietude.

In the May of this year Dr. Pusey, according to de Vere, preached "a long sweet solemn sermon, looking like a saint in tribulation or one over whom some great calamity was impending." When he called upon him three days later, "he looked ill, as if he had neither eaten nor slept for three days. He approached the subject of Newman three or four times, and glanced away again. At last he spoke of his change as certain, said it had been going on for these seven years and would be avowed this year; said it would be a great crisis and by far the greatest blow the cause had received. . . . My impression was that Dr. Pusey was speaking with much conscientious reserve and that he himself had drawn much nearer to Rome than of old."

Such was not as yet the case with de Vere himself. In argument he might take pleasure in subtle distinctions and ingenious definitions, but the controversial temper, leading men to seize upon any untried weapon at hand to demolish an antagonist, seemed to him almost as "flagrantly irreverent" as to find Carlyle "wielding the sword of the Lord and of Cromwell . . . to cut every knot, civil or ecclesiastical, which Scotch intelligence is insufficient to disentangle." And as he writes in his diary, in his opinion "the higher the Roman enthusiasm runs the less there is of internal seriousness and conscientiousness."

No one could have accused either him or Sara

Coleridge of this lack of internal seriousness ; indeed, when we see the subjects upon which they corresponded, and hear of consecutive hours spent in the discussion of ecclesiastical order or fundamental religious tenets, we feel as if the air they breathed must have been somewhat too heavily charged with theology. Though no doubt they found a pleasure in these lengthy discourses, dogmatic beliefs were fraught with too serious consequences to be mere subjects of intellectual interest. It was arduous work. Mrs. Coleridge was very far from strong, either in health or spirits, and we cannot be surprised to learn that upon one occasion her mother had fairly turned *de Vere* out of the house. He notes that Sara was often pale, tired, and sad, and when she was fit for the exertion he took her to see pictures, or walked with her in Regent's Park, and she said she found her evening rambles a relief after she had long been trying to keep up her spirits with her children.

As early as 1839, in discussing the prominent religious views of her contemporaries, she had written :—

“On some subjects specially handled by Newman and his school my judgment is suspended. On some points I think the apostolicals quite right, on others clearly unscriptural and unreasonable, wilfully and ostentatiously maintaining positions which, if carried out to their full length, would overthrow the foundations of all religion. I consider the party as having done great service to the religious world, and that in various ways : sometimes by bringing forth what is wholly and absolutely true ; sometimes by discussion on points on which I believe their own views to be partly erroneous ; sometimes by keenly detecting the self-flatteries and practical mistakes of religionists. But the worst of them, in my opinion, is

that they are, one and all, *party men*, and just so far as we become absorbed in a party, just so far are we in danger of parting with honesty and good sense; . . . Of course I do not mean that Mr. Newman and his brother divines exact pledges from one another like men on the hustings, but I do believe there is a tacit but efficient general compact among them all. . . . Now it seems to me that under these circumstances, truth has not quite a fair chance. A man has hardly time to *reflect on his reflections* and ask himself in the stillness of his heart whether the views he has put forth are strictly the truth, and nothing more or less than the truth; if the moment they have parted from him they are eagerly embraced by a set of prepossessed partisans, who assure him and all the rest of the world that they are thoroughly excellent." In a former portion of the same letter she had expressed herself as more disposed to trust Frederic Maurice, because he stood alone and looked only to God and his own conscience. Unlike her teacher, she was evidently hardly able to conceive of conscience, not only as the guiding star of the individual soul, but as the very light of the Church herself, and she was gradually becoming more and more persuaded that Aubrey de Vere was lifting up his eyes, not to the hills of Jerusalem but to those of Rome.

At the same time she was deeply interested in the troubling of the waters, and engrossed by the results, as exemplified in those of the Anglo-Catholic party with whom she now came in contact. Dr. Pusey especially could not fail to leave an impression of single-minded self-sacrificing devotion. "We have had Pusey and Manning preaching here lately," she writes in July, 1845, "the

former three times. Pusey's middle sermon, preached in the evening, was the perfection of his style. But it is wrong to talk of *style* in respect of a preacher whose very merit consists at his aiming at no *style* at all. He is certainly, to my feelings, more impressive than any one else in the pulpit, though he has not one of the graces of oratory. His discourse is generally a rhapsody, describing with minute repetition and accumulâiveness the wickedness of sin, the worthlessness of earth, and the blessedness of heaven. He is still as a statue all the time he is uttering it, looks as white as a sheet, and is as monotonous in delivery as possible. While listening to him you do not seem to see and hear a preacher, but to have visible before you a most earnest and devout spirit, striving to carry out in this world a high religious theory."

In their veneration for Dr. Pusey she and de Vere were in full agreement. But, more clear-sighted in some respects as to his tendencies than he was himself, soon after their acquaintance she had assured him, half in earnest, that he was on the road to Rome, and their divergencies, though not greater than they were, became more apparent as their intercourse took a more polemical turn.

Her correspondence, both with himself and others upon these questions, clearly indicates her position both as to feelings and convictions.

## CHAPTER XX

### SARA'S LATER LETTERS

Later correspondence—Its theological character—Attitude towards religious dogmas—Correspondence with Aubrey de Vere—Views on Church questions—Verdict on Luther—Poetical criticism—Dante and Milton—Characteristic differences

**D**URING the years following her husband's death a large proportion of Mrs. Coleridge's time was occupied by her correspondence; and in some respects these letters differ from those already quoted. Letter-writing to her, as to many of her contemporaries, was an art, but an art easily acquired by those whose spoken words were the fitting representatives of thoughtful and deliberate convictions. The epithets and carefully constructed sentences of feminine early Victorian writers had a not altogether fanciful resemblance to their elaborate ringlets, sprigged muslin gowns, and delicately shod feet. The fine Italian handwriting had a character of its own, and there are few blots or erasures to be discovered on the thin, large pages yellowed by time, carefully docketed, tied up with faded ribbon, and then laid aside or forgotten for nearly a century.

There are now comparatively few of Mrs. Coleridge's letters touching only upon matters of domestic or



transitory interest. She was ever looking beyond the precincts of her home, and the even narrower limits of a sick-room, to the world, not so much of action as of speculative thought, or back to the works of the great authors whom she had so deeply and perseveringly studied.

There are letters (to take only one notable example) like those of Edward Fitzgerald whose charm does not depend upon the subject-matter, and is indeed of so illusive a nature that it cannot be formulated or defined. A chance phrase, a passing illustration, a careless note, -all unconsciously reveals the writer's mind and character. The letter is as much part of himself as the hand that penned it. Of such familiar letters Henry Taylor writes in 1881: "Ease and fluency alone will not make them acceptable. . . . Writers who have been occupied all their lives in the moulding and shaping of language, and have a love of it for its own sake, may be expected to write even their familiar letters in the spirit of love and under the influence of the habits to which it has given birth. They will not, if they are wise, value their language above the thought it expresses, or for any admiration it may meet with; should they do so, it will be likely to lose its grace and charm. But such men, even in the soliloquies of thought, will often occupy and please themselves for the pleasure's sake only, with casting their thoughts into one form or another of language, and making out perhaps in the process what they are worth and whither they tend. And if they do so in talking to themselves, there is no reason they should do otherwise in writing to their friends."

Sara Coleridge, with her essentially meditative mind, was not likely, even under the stress of emotion, to use ill-considered words or untried weapons. She expressed herself without affectation in a style natural to one whose traditions and ideals were those of the literary men to whom she owed so much, and at all times with an absolute sincerity of purpose, never sacrificed to gratify self-love or gain an unfair advantage. She used her light lance in argument with confident precision, regardless of the approval or applause of her audience.

Her chastened spirits never overflowed their banks in a sudden uncontrollable rush, as was the case with Hartley's, when some wayward elfish freak sent him on a mad quest after strange effects and startling paradoxes. Her very playfulness had a method and an object, her mental attitude corresponding in an unusual degree with the grace and composure of her manner.

These long letters (for many of them are of immense length) are rarely discursive and never incoherent; indeed they are not infrequently confined to one topic, and the higher the theme the more appropriate is the diction. As Aubrey de Vere wrote, in the letter to her daughter already quoted: "She moved with the lightest step when she moved upon the loftiest ground. Her feet were beautiful on the mountain-tops of ideal thought. They were her native land, for her they were not barren; honey came up from the stony rock." (How curiously the words recall Hazlitt's often-quoted description of her father: "His genius had angelic wings and fed upon manna.") "In this respect I suppose she must have differed from almost all the

women we associate with literature. I remember hearing her say she did not consider herself to be a woman of letters. She felt herself more at ease in musing on the mysteries of the soul, or discussing the most arduous speculations of philosophy and theology than when dealing with humbler topics of literature."

The appreciation displays an intimate knowledge of her disposition and tastes. When brought into contact with the practical realities of life she was inclined to dogmatize, mistaking her own theories for indisputable facts, not from want of humility but as the consequence of a somewhat circumscribed experience; and one is almost relieved, amidst so much that is faultless, to detect some essentially feminine prejudices and a strong personal note of loyalty to early assumptions and accredited authorities. She was indeed gratefully conscious of all she owed to her teachers. For instance, in a letter full of critical discernment appraising the work of the novelists of her day, she writes: "You will acquit me of any affected pretence to originality of criticism when you recollect how early my mind was biassed by the strong talkers I was in the habit of listening to. The spirit of what I spout on critical matters, though not always the application, is generally derived from the sources you wot of." She adds, it is true, "My father and Wordsworth may have inspired the poetical taste of the age, but that does not exempt them from being amenable to criticism;" yet again and again instinct and affection displace this calmer judgment, and she insensibly refers principles both of taste and conduct to tribunals of her own appointment.

Upon theological questions her convictions were the result of individual research and spiritual experience. Much secret meditative reflection upon the great problems of life had preceded her clear and definite apprehension of eternal verities. And with her chief correspondent de Vere these were the matters most frequently discussed.

Her attitude in earlier years had been that of an eager disciple, and her desire to make choice of the surest guide was joined to an affectionate solicitude to reconcile the teaching of her father, Wordsworth, and Southey. In maturer life, in spite of her wide sympathies and conversancy with very various systems of divinity, religious questions were those she found it most difficult to approach with calmness and impartiality. Her dearest interests were too deeply involved. Intellectual doubts and difficulties, divergencies in creed and definitions of belief, were legitimate matters for discussion; but they were too closely intertwined with strong personal convictions for her to be capable of touching upon them without unconscious prejudice. Her very disposition to frame or adopt an intelligible system of morals, and her instinctive objection to vague generalities, made it more difficult to regard with indulgence the enunciation of incomprehensible or distasteful dogmas. Her dictum that "moral goodness cannot be evolved to the greatest extent without intellectual power," gave her a profound interest in the elucidation of religious beliefs. They were not to her, as they have been to some powerful understandings, unsolved mysteries or matters to be accepted with simple unquestioning faith. Though she stepped reverently upon sacred ground, it was in a

spirit of investigation and research. The path of knowledge, however arduous, must be trodden by her own unwearied feet ; she might claim assistance from some tried counsellor or extend a generous welcome to a fellow-student, but would avail herself of no second-hand premisses to arrive at a conclusion. There was no abstruse ethical or theological problem engaging the attention of earnest adherents to whose vindication or refutation she was not prepared to devote herself ; and now again, as in earlier years, mere headings of letters indicate the direction in which her mind was constantly working.

Letters upon the Athanasian Creed, Luther's doctrine of Justification, Baptismal Regeneration, the negative character of German philosophy, are addressed to correspondents whose interest in doctrinal questions was, like her own, of a deeper character than that of simple controversialists. In a mere tilting in the tournament she took no pleasure. As she well expresses it : "Replying and rejoining may go on *ad infinitum*, because, somehow or other, different thinkers assign such a different value to the same considerations. There is always a something left which cannot be churned up, like the buttermilk which cannot be turned into butter ; there is always something which cannot be absolutely settled by logic or reasoning, and this something determines whether you are to be on this side or that." "To confess the truth," so she writes again, "my own belief is that the whole logical truth is not the possession of any one party, that it exists in fragments amongst the several parties, and that much of it is yet to be developed." The admission is confirmed by reason and judgment, but when individual



tastes and predilections were affronted, assumptions were naturally mistaken for certainties and theories for established truths. With every desire to be sincere and open-minded, she had an intuitive distrust of disciplinary methods.

She was becoming more and more persuaded the Tractarian Movement was a dangerous inroad upon sober-minded Anglicanism. It had not the incendiary force of the Evangelical revival, destructive of historic landmarks and precedents, and by an irresponsible agency kindling spiritual fires in dangerous proximity to ecclesiastical institutions ; but its organized force needed to be even more sedulously repelled as likely to exercise an insidious and deleterious influence upon educated minds and cultivated intellects. She was also provoked with High Church divines for some of their dry dogmas, which, "as distinctive opinions, have no practical value, as far as I can see, but which they set up for saving truths, and denounce all other Christians for doubting." Nevertheless she confesses she would rather join the Tractarians than any other party if she were forced to join any, their theology being upon the whole the most accurate and reliable. This explains her continued attendance at Christ Church, Albany Street, one of the leading churches where Catholic doctrines were preached without reserve ; the ritual, to a degree exceptional in those days, emphasizing and illustrating the teaching. There are records of conversations upon theological questions with Mr. Dodsworth, conducted on both sides with candour and moderation, but no arguments could bridge over the mental gulf between a man of strong ecclesiastical and sacerdotal prepossessions, and one who, like Mrs. Cole-

ridge, was avowedly an unattached free-lance, ready to enrol herself on either side according to the particular point at issue. For "the theology of all parties needed," as she said, "to be ventilated and sifted." And indeed upon one occasion she described herself as a "pious rationist" (*sic*). In one of her letters to Aubrey de Vere, no doubt to his distressed astonishment, she singled out Luther as an heroic example of a religious reformer. "The world upon the whole," she affirmed, "had never seen a greater man." She would even have enlarged more upon this theme were it not that at this time, the year of the Irish famine, "he was working hard to be useful to his fellow-creatures in a tedious way." But her correspondent was far too eager for polemical debates to be silenced by concessions merely accorded to circumstances. He evidently took up the challenge with zest, in haste to demolish opinions so repugnant, as he conceived, to high spiritual conceptions of a religious mission ; and in a spirited letter she replies to his attack. "I regret our difference of feeling and opinion concerning Luther more than on any other subject, but differences on persons are not differences on things. Did I conceive the old reformer as you conceive him, I should admire him no more than you do. I marvel how you can admit him to be a *hero* if you believe his strength to have been 'of a very physical kind'—look upon him as a religious demagogue, 'a self-intoxicated man.' It seems to me that you do by Luther what has been so often done by my father : that is, that you present an exaggerated image of the mere surface of the man—the outside of his character—for the man himself. I believe that Luther was not that *mere* tempestuous struggler for liberty, that coarse, bold,

irreverent, self-deceiving fanatic whom you present to me. . . . Do you think I admire Luther's doctrine for its spiritual energy and boldness? No, I admire the energy and boldness for the sake of the doctrine."

Here, at any rate, there is no inclination to defer to an honoured friend, no fear of meeting a well-equipped antagonist upon equal terms, nor any dislike to the setting forth of unpalatable truths. De Vere and Mrs. Coleridge had an equally keen appreciation of the importance of doctrinal truths as regulating conduct and influencing character, but they looked at them from different standpoints. She could not sympathize in his unremitting search for the Church's title-deeds, since she was assured truth carried its own credentials, which needed no official signature. "There is but one standard to which all mankind can be referred on such subjects as these," she writes, "but one last court of appeal. Is not that reason, or the power within the human mind of beholding religious truth, in substance, with the understanding or faculty by which the intellectual form of faith is determined? Whatever comes to us from without, by this inward medium we must receive it. If you accept a doctrine merely on authority which you cannot prove to others to be reasonable and coherent, how can you look for unity of doctrine among mankind?"

De Vere considers her to be unsound and heretical, and she believes his creed has no sure scriptural foundation. It is partly the result of "a vague impression that what is hardest and strangest to believe is therefore the highest form of faith." Nevertheless, in all their many long-drawn-out theological arguments, they shared a consolatory conviction that they were united by some hidden

link, some bond of Christian experience, minimizing and softening divergencies of opinion. And they possessed in fullest measure one of the most enduring elements in friendship—an "audacious trust" in each other's sincerity, in spite of an acknowledged disparity in their mental and spiritual vision.

They differed even upon the less debatable ground of poetical criticism. Mrs. Coleridge, with a clearer and more unbiassed judgment, had less poetical intuition. "You overpraise," she asserts, "both negatively and positively, by omission of faults and drawbacks, unless they are of a kind (such as Shelley's want of reverence, and Cromwell's antagonism to Bishops and Kings) especially to excite your disapprobation and dislike, and by the conversion of certain deficiencies into large and glorious possibilities." She considers poetical enthusiasm has warped his understanding, and though she agrees in all he says of Keats's poetry she strongly objects to his exalting him into a "poetical seraph." She would probably likewise have demurred to his persuasion that some defect of cerebral organization must be responsible for Shelley's want of reverence. "I can never make out whether Shelley was a fallen angel, still fierce with the pride that caused that fall, or an angel in duress struggling with sad limitations. Something angelic there certainly was about him"—so he writes; but we feel that Sara Coleridge, with her strong sense of the fitness of things, could hardly be expected to extend a like indulgence to cardinal defects, and if she had chanced to meet with a fallen angel would have decidedly desired to relegate him to his proper sphere.



There is such varied and individual interest in this detailed correspondence, carried on at intervals for almost ten years, that it is difficult to make extracts. The letters upon the respective merits of Milton and Dante, regarded from a theological standpoint, are, however, too characteristic to be omitted.

In a somewhat impossible comparison between the Divinity of Milton and Dante, as exemplified in "Paradise Lost" and the "Divina Commedia," both disputants were hot in attack and defence. She ascribes de Vere's disapproval of Milton's conceptions to Catholic predilections and prejudices; and he seems to her to view the superlative merits of Dante "through a glorifying glass bigger than that with which Herschel inspected the sun." And to her mind, though "the 'Divina Commedia' is one of the great poems of the world," of all the great poems she thinks it "least abounding in grace, loveliness, and splendour. . . . It may truly be said that Dante brings the violence and turbulence of the infernal world into heaven—witness his 27th canto of the 'Paradiso' which is all denunciation [with the exception] of the splendid introduction, yet comprises, to my mind, with slight exceptions, almost the whole power of the 'Paradiso'; on the merits of which, as at present advised, I quite agree with Landor; while Milton invests even the realms below and their fallen inhabitants with a touch of heavenly beauty and splendour. . . . It is this which renders Milton's descriptions so *pathetic*; sympathy with human nature, with fallen finite nature, pervades the whole. . . . Dante ought to have looked upon the tortures of the lower kingdom with awe and a sorrowful shuddering, not with triumphant delight and horrid



mirth. But the whole conception was barbarous though powerfully executed. . . . If you set up a claim for Dante that this is the great Catholic Christian mind, then *αφισταμαι* I am off and to a great distance. . . . I must not enter the field of Spirit versus Matter. I only beseech your attention to this point. God is a Spirit, and yet He is Substance and the Head and Fountain of all Substance, and the Son is of one Substance with the Father. If the tendency of the whole creation, when not dragged down by sin, is upward to the Creator, then surely there is a progress away from matter into spirit. This I believe to be Platonism, and this Platonism Schelling, Coleridge, and others have tried to revive. You oppose to them Mediævalism, or the semi-Pagan doctrine of the primitive Christians, *converts from Paganism*, and both parties appeal to Scripture." Here her very phraseology makes it abundantly clear there is a divergency between them far deeper than that of mere intellectual or poetical criticism; the party of those she describes as "Antiquarian High Churchmen" (to which she supposes Mr. de Vere to belong), being indeed deeply anxious to set upon the doctrines they taught the honourable seal of primitive Christianity.

But it was around the person of Lucifer himself the contention was sharpest. In defence of the Satan of "Paradise Lost" she quotes her father's opinion that the character was deeply philosophical, as well as poetically sublime, in the very highest degree. "What," she adds, "is Dante's Lucifer? Has he not all that contrariety to reason which you find in Milton's Satan, without one particle of the sublimity? He is a fallen

angel too, but every bit of the angel is well done out of him, and how he ever could have been aught of the kind is inconceivable. After all is not the irrationality of which you speak contained in the very idea of a personal evil Being, the Adversary of God? What better account of such a Being can you give, what better conception of him can you frame than Milton's, or rather, I should say, how can you avoid such conceptions as his, if you admit the idea at all? If he be a personal agent he must be powerful, he must be proud and rebellious, he must be capable of assuming splendid and alluring aspects, and if he be a personal being and have a personal history how can the symbol be realized more finely than Milton has done it?" But her correspondent remained unconvinced. Without going so far as Dr. Johnson, who affirmed that Satan is the hero of "Paradise Lost," he considers "the character an absolute misconception whether measured by a philosophical or poetical standard, not to speak of one higher than these." He agreed with Archbishop Whateley that "Paradise Lost" was unequivocally Arian and that Milton in earlier days would have shown something of that sacred reserve which Dante never discarded when dealing with holy things; "he would never have made the Almighty discuss predestination like a school-divine, or make spiritual angels hurl material mountains on their foes—spiritual not less."

And thus for many pages the argument is carried on; with thrust and parry, challenge and counter-challenge; no mock-heroic combat, no mere exercise of literary ingenuity; conducted with an earnestness befitting the theme, though with occasional more light-

hearted and less impersonal side-strokes at some weak spot fortunately detected in the adversary's armour.

Such letters demand not only liberty of spirit, but leisure, less easily to be attained by the mistress of a household and the dweller in a town than by a poet in the retirement of the country. Yet neither would have allowed the noise of the world's traffic and the insistent demands of passers-by to disturb the contemplative calm in which transcendental verities can alone be concerned or apprehended.

During the years of the Irish famine de Vere was mostly in Ireland, and it was no longer a time for even a poet to see visions and dream dreams. He took a prominent part in carrying out the measures of the Government, too often mistaken or inadequate, for the relief of the people, unexpectedly displaying under the stress of circumstances unusual practical abilities. He served on committees, harangued infuriated mobs with an imperturbable good temper and self-possession, and was a sympathetic witness of the helpless suffering and heroism of the peasantry. The blackness of the tragedy overshadowed even his sanguine spirit, and at this time the correspondence with Mrs. Coleridge, though seldom intermitted, was at once graver and less polemical than before.

## CHAPTER XXI

### HARTLEY'S LAST YEARS

Faber at Ambleside—Hartley's ideal Church—Disestablishment—Hartley's politics—Love for animals—A summer Sunday—Biblical studies—Penitence in verse—The care bestowed upon Hartley by his friends—Procrastination inevitable—Failing health—Hartley's death.

IT was not in London alone or in academical seats of learning that what Carlyle called the "strange portent of Puseyism" had manifested itself. It might not always be the predominant theme, but the pure speculative theology, the patristic definitions of dogma, and the high sacramental teaching upon which persons like Aubrey de Vere and Sara Coleridge were dwelling, was taking a practical shape and was fruitful in startling and sometimes unforeseen results. There were not only minds to be informed but souls to be saved.

In the forefront of the movement were men, of whom Hurrell Froude was an example, knowing nothing of reservations or compromises in their crusade against the tyrannies of custom and the counterfeits of truth. Others, like Frederick Faber, afterwards the well-known Oratorian, were more concerned in bringing the message home to the individual conscience than in the vindication

of doctrinal formularies or in the defence of the constitution and organization of the Church. They had, indeed, consciously foresworn the moderation and prudence hardly to be reconciled with a fire of apostolic zeal and missionary enthusiasm.

Whilst Mrs. Henry Coleridge was patiently disentangling the closely interwoven threads of knotty problems and calmly reviewing the groundworks of belief, the inhabitants of the district in which her brother lived were startled out of their ordinary routine of religious observances by a preacher who regarded a stereotyped Anglicanism as altogether inadequate for the conversion of mankind. In 1839 Faber came as a deacon to Ambleside and was preaching twice a week with an awakening, disturbing, incomprehensible fervour more easily to be pardoned in an itinerant Methodist than in a duly ordained and accredited minister of the Gospel.

Fresh from the seething atmosphere of ecclesiastical revolution, the high hopes and distracting controversies of Oxford, he found himself transplanted to the silence of the hills and the companionship of men who knew nothing of the fever and stress of the fight. Wordsworth, as a poet, had a strong and moulding influence over his own poetic mind; for, well or sick, he could, as he said, "always get happiness and quiet and good resolves out of the old poet—God bless him!" but though Wordsworth's "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" and Southey's "Book of the Church" might worthily frame or embody the great truths of Christianity, he "abhorred to see men's salvation thrown into a demonstrable syllogism, or the things of God weighed by the short



measures of man, and not by the measures of the sanctuary." "I wish to see a mind bowed down before the seven branched candlesticks of the Spirit, deeply influenced by the brooding air of the temple, the fumes of the frankincense and the unearthly light of the glorious Pillar of Presence."

In short, Faber's methods for the propagation of the Faith were the weapons of the religious revivalist rather than those of the scholar and divine. His hearers were taken by surprise. Many of them were educated, serious-minded people, prepared to listen without prejudice; but some amongst these robust northerners may well have shared the objection made by a parishioner to Mr. Tryan's evangelical sermons, and have found his assertion that they were sinners a "most uncivil heresy."

Hartley Coleridge could have hardly failed in any case to espouse an unpopular cause: and the revolutionary spirit dispensing with artificial safeguards was essentially congenial to him. "Ambleside was," he writes, "a house divided against itself" respecting this setter-forth of strange doctrine; and it is easy to perceive to which division in the camp he himself belonged.

Faber, he confessed, was High Church to "the very verge of Romanism. I have heard him but once. He is evidently a man of genius; he has the pale face, wild eye, and self-oblivious manner which evinces sincere enthusiasm. He is not the man to fling brimstone at the heads of an unoffending congregation, and then go and dine with the worst sinner that will give him a good feed. Of his sincerity there can be

no doubt—of his Christian sanity I have my suspicions. At all events he has put the sincerity of his hearers to an *experimentum crucis*."

At the same time Hartley had no sympathy with the Anglo-Catholic party in their desire to restore mediæval ceremonies as rightfully symbolizing the doctrines of the Church and testifying to her continuity. He said they were putting the Church clock back, but could not put the time of day back with it; and yet he added: "I do not join the vulgar pack in hunting down these poor Oxford divines. I reverence them as I reverence the noble and the honest. Their aim is not preferment; it is not popularity; but what they look upon as truth, and truth too for the truth's sake. They court not the great, and, what is better still, they court not the many. They'll all die poor and out of favour with the million."

It is curious to find some correspondence of feeling in a letter of Carlyle's upon the same subject. "I do not dislike the Puseyites so ill as you do; in fact, though I think them as mad as anybody does, I might say I rather like them well. They have many good ideas, genuinely true and sadly forgotten in our times, and the practical application they make of all these seems so entirely distracted as to be altogether harmless, and incapable of injuring anything except the Church of England itself."

The "distractedness," as subversive of spiritual limitations, was rather pleasing than otherwise to Hartley. The Church, as Faber set it forth, was no mere ecclesiastical department of the State; it was a Divine organization and a living power in their midst. He

had troubled the waters, but it was a loss to the congregation when in 1842 he quitted Ambleside to take up a parochial charge elsewhere.

If Hartley's temper was far removed from that of the ascetic or the visionary, his conception of an ideal Church upon earth was not so much an *Ecclesia docens* as a sanctuary where rich and poor, saints and sinners, might meet on the ground of a common humanity, and where, in a clearer, truer light, earthly judgments should be reversed and worldly distinctions obliterated. The Erastian spirit was abhorrent to him, and when such opinions were less common than they are now, he was disposed to be a Liberationist, believing that the Church, emancipated from State control, would be more free to accomplish her spiritual mission. He had therefore much sympathy with a movement tending to vindicate her true character and deliver her from a secular yoke. "One great object of my mind," he wrote, "is to show that Church property is property, not pension. Do not risk it by a servant-like partiality to the splendour of the crown."

Upon politics he shared neither Wordsworth's well-considered moral judgments nor Southey's vehemence of personal feeling. Wordsworth, indeed, looking down upon him from the altitude of Conservative dignity, called him "an extreme Radical who can never mention a Bishop or a King from King David downwards without some atrabilious prefix or other. . . . Shelley, you see, was one of these ;" adding with great simplicity, "*And what did his poetry come to?*" A question to which posterity has given an answer that might surprise him.

It was true that Hartley would at times in conversation indulge a tendency to extravagance, and set dignitaries at nought. Thus Aubrey de Vere relates that one evening at Miss Fenwick's, he was, somewhat to the distress of their hostess, in a splenetic mood, and had a quarrel with Mr. Quillinan, the husband of Dora Wordsworth, on the subject of liberty, when Hartley affirmed that nothing but true religion or £500 per annum would make any man loyal. The quarrel was terminated by Aubrey the peace-maker, who quoted some doggerel lines of Hartley's own :—

“What, then, is freedom? Rightly understood,  
A universal licence—to be good.”

In truth Hartley knew little either of the legislative qualities of the political reformer, or of the single-hearted passion of the revolutionist. He had formulated no scheme of Christian socialism, but a sense of universal brotherhood made him the affectionate comrade of every one he met from the tethered donkey upwards, about whom, when he passed him in the meadow, he could not forbear to throw his arms. To strike a child or ill-treat a dumb animal was to forfeit his friendship for ever.

As in the animal creation, so in the world around, the most ordinary sights and sounds—the ripple of a stream, the sunlight on a rain-washed flower, the sweep of the wind across the cornfields, the afternoon shadows on the hills—were more to him than majestic effects or dramatic surprises. Over and over again, both in poetry and in prose, his subjection to their influence is recorded.



Here, for instance, is a description of a summer Sunday, breathing the very spirit of the day, and concluding with a singular account of his own Sunday occupations and religious exercises.

"The morning was the very perfection of stillness. No gay sunshine, no clamorous wind, no drudging rain ; the sky wore one grey sober veil, and the mist hung upon the hills as if it paused on its journey ; the vapours were gathered up ; no light detachments foraged along the mountain-sides to catch the flying sunbeams, but the thick masses formed an even line like an army drawn up for a decisive engagement, and only halting till the truce of God was past. . . . The vale was clad in deepest green and fancifully resembled the face of one that is calm and patient after long weeping. The few patches of hay gathered into round cocks appeared to solicit the prayers of the congregation. All was quiet, pensive, sad." He was pleased to see the little rustics in their blue stuff frocks setting out for the Ambleside rush bearing, and deliberated as to whether he should go to church himself. Finally he set forth, with Bible and Prayer Book, and, calling in at the Sunday-school on his way to see the teachers and scholars, discovered "how sweet even a plain woman can look when unaffectedly engaged in doing good."

After this he found himself thirsty, called at the "Red Lion" and took "a sober potation of John Barleycorn—got into church (*mirabile dicta*) in time—John does duty very respectably—first lesson, David's politic getting rid of Saul's family—second, a truly heavenly chapter 13th of John, admirably calculated to remove unsafe impressions of the first." This is followed by some serious



comments and criticisms on the sermon, and he resolves to write a poetical address to the Supreme Being. On returning home, he drinks a glass of wine with F. and corrects his political views on the Beer Tax ! As night descends "the horned moon looking tranquility gives promise of better times. Now will I read a chapter and go to bed, for it is Monday morning."

What a strange medley we have here ! He begins his day, like a country curate, setting forth early for Sunday-school and church ; being indeed always ready to fulfil clerical functions, and finding them not at all incompatible with his other avocations. Nor is his attendance at the service perfunctory ; he ponders the unsafe teaching of the Old Testament lesson and puts down an abstract, too long to be quoted, of the sermon, in which he objects to faith being described as the concurrent duty, rather than as the constituent power, of good works. Nevertheless, the inspiration to write a religious poem has faded before he reaches home and he recurs to his views on the Malt Tax. The day is not to close without a revival of religious impressions, and he reads a chapter of the Bible before he goes to bed.

His Bible was indeed his constant companion. It is full of underlined passages and marginal notes, some purely critical and some indicative of deeper personal feeling. In the Old Testament, Isaiah, the Book of Job, and the Psalms were most frequently studied. He accepted the fundamental articles of the Christian creed with the loyalty of a disciple and the simplicity of a child. From the time when in his little bed, with his nurse by his side, he had prayed at length and extempore every night, he had never omitted the practices of

devotion. One of the strangest suggestions as to his calling in life had been that he should qualify himself for Holy Orders. But for so presumptuous a supposition he could hardly be held responsible, and only referred to it to express his thankfulness that he had not been tempted to seriously contemplate such an unjustifiable proceeding. In later years he was regular in his attendance at church, though when there he occasionally assumed the attitude of an approving beneficent spirit, and to the surprise of the congregation would rise from his knees whilst they were still engaged in prayer, spreading out his hands above their heads in a gesture of benediction, and with a gentle, benevolent smile.

Failure and defeat, it must be remembered, do not necessarily imply a voluntary surrender. With Hartley the struggle might be weak and vacillating and too often interrupted ; it was never determinately or consciously abandoned ; and it is impossible to discredit the sincerity of the penitence frequently recorded in memoranda intended for no eye but his own.

Thus in a MS. book of 1827 he writes: "With the last day of the first month I conclude this miscellaneous chaos of sense and nonsense. Like a candle lighted at both ends my book is exhausted in the centre. It was begun when I stood high in the world, proud but not glad of academic honours, with all the material but alas ! without the moral of happiness. Its conclusion finds me a beggar ; bankrupt in estate, in love, in friendship, and worst of all in self-esteem. Yet the faith with which it was commenced has ripened into certainty and the sad knowledge of what I am feelingly informs me what I might have been."

Then comes the happily recurrent though irrelevant note of hope. "This day too I beheld the first snow-drop, the earliest primrose. Nature begins to revive, and why should I not commence a new year from this day?"

Founded upon no more certain grounds than the blossoming of a flower, such hopes could hardly be expected to bear much fruit. But in his verse there are passages wherein repentance is connected with an assurance of restitution and pardon :—

"If I am weak, yet God is strong,  
If I am false, yet God is true.  
Old things are past, or right or wrong,  
And every day that comes is new.  
To-morrow then fresh hope may bring,  
And rise with healing on its wing."

Or again, in his description of the repentant Magdalene :—

"And He wiped off the soiling of despair  
From her sweet soul, because she loved so much.  
I am a sinner full of doubts and fears,  
Make me a humble thing of love and tears."

Perhaps the most pathetic of all his retrospective expressions of penitence are the lines written in an old school-book :—

"When I received this volume small,  
My years were barely seventeen ;  
When it was hoped I should be all  
Which once, alas ! I might have been."

And now my years are thirty-five,  
 And every mother hopes her lamb,  
 And every happy child alive,  
 May never be what now I am."

He had, in truth, that redeeming quality to which much is forgiven. It was the cord binding together many heterogeneous elements in his character; and in middle age he retained, in all its fulness, one of the most precious of his gifts—a very real perception of the beauty of holiness.

His moral disasters had not made shipwreck of his faith, and it was by no means inactive. There were many

"Little unremembered acts  
 Of kindness or of love"

of which only his good angel kept the record. No wonder the country people said they would go through fire and water for Mr. Coleridge.

Two of these humble and affectionate friends, Mr. and Mrs. Richardson, who had long been domesticated with him as his host and hostess at Nab Cottage, spared no thought or trouble to cheer and alleviate his lot, to secure his comfort and save him from the consequences of his foibles. Mrs. Wordsworth herself would at times overlook his wardrobe, and supply deficiencies of which he was not aware. In fact all round him seem to have regarded his failings with pitying forbearance, and the fine qualities of his mind with exceptional admiration.

As was well said: "The fates that had attended him

through life ruled also as it drew to its close. He had been the sport of Fortune; but Fortune seemed ever repenting her hardness to him. Whenever he tripped it was amongst friends, not thieves, that he fell. As often as he went astray the 'spirit in his feet' led him to some kindly place of refuge."

His last years showed a revival of energy. He successfully delivered some lectures at Kendal; he finished his *Life of Massinger* and when correcting the proofs cheerfully prognosticated for it some measure of success.

Wordsworth was inclined to rank his prose higher than his verse. The workmanship of the latter he declared to be too hasty and to have indeed too much the air of an Italian *improvisatore* production, but he could find "no words to express" the admiration he felt for his genius and talents. It distressed the poet to have to warn Moxon against engaging him for any unperformed work when either time or quantity was of importance; but it was perfectly true that to feel himself bound to send copy to a publisher at any given time was, with Hartley, rather a deterrent than an incentive to industry. It induced a state of mind his father adroitly justified when he said of himself: "The moral obligation is to me so very strong a stimulant, that in nine cases out of ten it acts as a narcotic."

Nevertheless Hartley worked at these his latest productions with painstaking diligence, the MSS. being transcribed no less than four times.

His mind was as active and fertile as ever, but his physical powers were diminished; he could no longer ramble so widely about the country nor climb the distant hills. Yet it was not until the December of



1848, when he was in his fifty-third year, that a sudden attack of illness laid him low. The four walls of his cottage closed around him, and he might no longer cross the threshold.

On Christmas Day his sister received alarming tidings as to his condition from Mrs. Wordsworth. She was well aware that a journey to the north was beyond her power, and a meeting after their long separation might have proved more agitating than consolatory. But he was surrounded by those to whom he had for long been a dear and familiar presence. Wordsworth came down from his serene heights to comfort and sustain him. Derwent, now a Prebendary of St. Paul's, the sharer of his childish joys and troubles, his inseparable companion when the little brothers, united in truest, fondest bonds of loyalty and friendship, wandered hand in hand among the hills, arrived in haste at Grasmere to minister to him in his sickness; and when the tidings of his danger were spread abroad personal attachment put the whole country-side in mourning.

Though sickness was a new experience to Hartley, for he had never before suffered from a serious malady, the thought of death was familiar, and his roving spirit had frequently made imaginary incursions into the unknown country beyond.

"Death," he wrote, "can never be indifferent till man is assured, which none ever was yet, that with his breath his very being passes into nothing; whether his hopes and fears steer by the compass of a formal creed or drift along the shoreless sea of faithless conjecture, a possible eternity of bliss or bale can never be indifferent."

He was not indifferent now. His mind was perfectly clear, he was conscious of his condition and made calm preparations for his departure.

"Comment faire pour bien mourir ?" Amiel asks, and asks in vain. "Il n'y a pas d'antécédent pour cela. Il faut improviser ; que c'est donc difficile." But to Hartley, the dreamer, death was scarcely more strange than life.

In this supreme moment character was not obliterated. With failing strength and halting breath, still preserving his old powers of eloquent and unpremeditated diction, he circumstantially and penitently reviewed his whole life, and upon this confession, the last simple and trustful effort of the returning prodigal, death mercifully set its seal.

It was a fitting sequel to the earliest chapters of his life that the brother who had shared his childish confidences should have ministered to him at its close ; and that the old poet who had so often held him in his arms should have knelt at his side to receive his last Communion with him.

To the last, life had held for this child of earth much that was precious. He had no wish to break the links which bound him to its dear familiarities. But he had never made an enemy and he had no quarrel with death. Amongst the many strange fantastic images crowding upon his mind there had been none so base and dark as to banish the purer visions which were his consolation in the hour of his extremity. He had fought the battle of life but feebly, and he had lost it ; yet he uttered no complaint and none would cast his defeat in his teeth. In the world he was quitting he had found much

kindness and good fellowship, he had been blessed by its friendships and warmed by its sunshine, he had spent many pleasant hours in the companionship of noble minds; if he had drifted, a forlorn figure, across the path of literature, he had let fall no sullied pages, no dishonoured work.

In characteristic phrase he had wished to be buried in some village churchyard, "where nothing betokened aristocracy, unless it were the venerable memorial of some old family long extinct." He hoped "that the school might adjoin the churchyard and that the children might have a holiday on the day of his funeral." And in some respects he had his wish. The entrance to Grasmere churchyard is on one side through a lych-gate under which you pass to the village school, and Wordsworth himself chose out the quiet spot close to the space reserved for himself where the poor wanderer in devious paths should at last be laid to rest. "Let him lie by us," he said; "he would have wished it." The place is marked by a marble cross with a crown of thorns sculptured upon it, and those who, year by year, make their pilgrimage in love and reverence to Wordsworth's tomb, must needs tread softly by the grave of Hartley Coleridge.

## CHAPTER XXII

### SARA'S FRIENDS

Family likeness—Poems on infancy—Education of children—London society—The Carlyles—Mrs. Jameson—Mr. Kenyon—Meeting with the Brownings—Two American friends, Professor Reed and Mr. Ellis Yarnall—Comments on Hartley—Collection made of his works—Publication of Memoir

**H**ARTLEY'S death could not affect his sister with the piercing force of a blow severing the bonds of personal intimacy and intercourse ; nevertheless she experienced an overwhelming sense of loss. In some respects she was lonely, and in the background of her mind there had been, together with much anxiety, a valued sense of the existence of an elder brother with whose ways of thought she had much in common. It almost seemed as if, in course of time, their mutual inherited powers and interest in kindred subjects might have broken down the barrier distance and diverse moral qualities had erected between them.

She had less creative genius, less spontaneity, though her constructive intellectual talents were more highly developed. Her vision was in some instances more circumscribed, at the same time it was clearer, and her knowledge upon a great many subjects more accu-

rate and profound. Hartley's poetical powers far exceeded her own, but she was a more acute and better-informed critic. Both had singularly religious minds, yet Hartley, though he might take pleasure in theological disputations, knew nothing of the serious and ever-painful sense of real issues involved in the adoption of a definite creed. He had no desire to weld the flying fragments of truth into a coherent whole; whilst to his sister the desire to eliminate, to apprehend, to set in order, was, if not a necessary part of Christian duty, at least, in her opinion, the absorbing preoccupation of an enlightened spirit.

With regard to religious sentiments and beliefs, there was an analogy between them markedly evidencing the power of heredity. Sentences taken casually from their father's works and correspondence bear striking witness to the union in himself of their several dispositions. "Though all my doubts are done away, though Christianity is my *passion*," so he writes as early as 1797, "it is too much my *intellectual* passion; and therefore will do me but little good in the hour of temptation and calamity." Here, like Hartley, he weighs himself in the balance and anticipates failure; but the intellectual element in his belief is distinctively Sara's. Again, Coleridge describes himself as one who "feels the want, the necessity of religious support; who cannot afford to lose any the smallest buttress; who not only loves Truth even for itself, and when it reveals itself aloof from all interest, but who loves it with an indescribable awe"—which causes him to—"creep toward the light, even though it draw him away from the more nourishing warmth." "Yea, I should do



so," he adds, "even if the light had made a way through the rent in the wall of the Temple."

Here we have Hartley clinging like a child to religious associations, the *creeping* towards the light so often expressive of the humility of his aspirations; and Sara, to whose more rationalistic conceptions it appeared quite possible that a breach in the wall of the Temple might be needed to let the light come through.

Sara's criticism, both in acumen and phraseology, bears a strong resemblance to her father's, most markedly exemplified in the pages of the "Biographia Literaria."

"Good sense," Coleridge writes, "is the body of Poetic genius, Fancy its drapery, Motion its life, and Imagination the soul that is everywhere in each, and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole."

And his daughter's criticism on Wordsworth, even in the turn of the sentences, breathes her father's spirit. "The fancy in Mr. Wordsworth's poems is rather like the miniature painting of one who has been used to a bold style in crayons. . . . In one poem especially Fancy does but flit like a swallow over a depth of human tenderness."

There are, as a matter of fact, numberless instances of community of ideas and feelings to arrest the attention of those who make more than a superficial study of Coleridge's writings, Hartley's poems, or Sara's notes and essays; but nowhere is it more apparent than in the love so strongly manifested, both by Coleridge and Hartley, for the state of infancy. Poetic imaginations and tenderness are commingled, and wide as may be their divergencies when other subjects are in

question, the sight or memory of a baby at once sets their hearts aflame. Whether in song, sonnet, or elegy, the same note is sounded.

"Children's prattle was to them  
Sweeter than all the heathen Greek  
That Helen spoke when Paris wooed!"

The theme seems to be prompted by the same brain and put into form by the same composer. It is not merely a matter of the mutual fondness for children, already so often recorded, but of similarity of expression.

Coleridge's lines on the death of an unbaptized infant, for example, might well have been written by Hartley :—

"Be rather than be call'd a child of God,  
Death whispered. With assenting nod  
Its head upon the Mother's breast  
The baby bow'd and went without demur,  
Of the Kingdom of the blest  
Possessor, not inheritor."

The verse recalls Hartley's lines on the death of his sister's twin children, and kindred thoughts arise again and again within his mind and guide his pen.

Sara Coleridge shared her father's love for children, but even for her own children it was of a less feminine quality; a strong and deep affection, not so much concerned with baby charms, as with the seeds of more enduring characteristics it was her happiness and duty to guard and nourish. The child's soul, the child's intelligence, the child's conscience, were the first

objects of her watchful care ; and it is curious that the longest description of her little boy's appearance, of his bright blue eyes, sturdy limbs, and rosy cheeks, is an answer to detailed questions addressed to her by Hartley. While with regard to his intellectual development she shared to the fullest possible degree the interest her father had taken in stimulating his little son's intelligence.

As the children grew older she devoted more and more time to their instruction, her classical attainments enabling her to give valuable assistance to Herbert. When he was fifteen she read with him in the holidays the "Eumenides" of Æschylus, a great part of the "Choephoræ," and the "Olympus" of Pindar ; and it can have been no great surprise when two years later he burst in upon her, "like a beam of light," to announce his success in the competition for the Newcastle Scholarship. By this time he had possibly distanced her, but she had still her daughter Edith to instruct and guide in branches of knowledge outside the usual range of governess tuition.

Nor was she by any means solely occupied with her children's instruction.

She wrote several articles for the "Quarterly" and other Reviews and periodicals ; and her letters were frequently criticisms on books and authors—Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson, Shelley, Scott's novels, the Brontës, Miss Austen : careful studies showing an intimate knowledge of her subjects, lightened by some brilliant intuitions. The art of light versification was the one she least liked to employ ; she abjured the fashion of the day for albums and treasuries of verse ; and



HERBERT COLERIDGE, AGED 17  
FROM THE DRAWING BY GEORGE RICHMOND, R.A.





declined even at Mrs. Norton's request to employ her talents in their service.

Moreover, during the years of her children's adolescence she was enlarging her acquaintance with distinguished literary persons who were becoming more and more aware of the very unusual gifts and talents of Coleridge's daughter. Passing references in her letters indicate the kind of society she frequented.

"I have almost too much excitement from intercourse with interesting people," she writes in July, 1848. "I feel the charm of London society deeply, but my nervous system is so weak and irritable that I seem always on the verge of being outdone, even though I keep quite on the outskirts of the gay busy world, and go out little in comparison with most of my friends—very seldom (never if I can help it) two nights consecutively."

"I dined at Chevalier Bunsen's. . . . It was a most pleasant party. I was also at pleasant ones at Lord Monteagle's, where I met Whewell and [was delighted with his talk; at Sir Robert Inglis's and Serjeant Stewart's and met Carlyle. . . . I should have had party fever, had I not run away."

The acquaintance with the Carlyles brought about many other meetings both at her own house and elsewhere. Had she but overlooked his *Journal* she could hardly have met him with cordiality, after his fierce condemnation of Coleridge in the very year of his death, not in any way to be justified even by his own unhappy condition of health and spirits.

He speaks of the "Table Talk" as insignificant for the most part, of the author as "a helpless Psyche overspun with Church of England cobwebs; a weak, diffusive,

ineffectual weltering man," though he sees in him "one glorious upstruggling ray"; and in the "Table Talk" a great possibility that has not realized itself.

Mrs. Henry Coleridge, in spite of her well-balanced judgment, was naturally sensitive to adverse comments on her father, but no such strictures were uttered in her presence and she had a personal liking for Carlyle. She thought he too much depreciated money as an instrument and "battled with him a little on this point." "He is always smiling and good-natured when I contradict him, perhaps because he sees that I admire him all the while." She has also a great admiration for his writings, upon which she frequently comments.

Macaulay was another celebrity who had an especial interest for her as having a likeness (amid a great unlikeness) to her father. "It is not in the features, which in my father were more vague, but resides very much in the look and expression of the material of the face, the mobility, softness, and sensitiveness of all the flesh. . . . The eyes are quite unlike, even opposite in expression—my father's in-looking and visionary, Macaulay's out-looking and objective; but his talk, though different as to sentiment and matter, was like a little in manner, in labyrinthine multiplicity and multitudinousness, and the tones, so flexible and sinuous, reminded me of the departed eloquence."

Mrs. Jameson was another friend of these years of widowhood; her warmth and kindness of heart, her energy and spirit, bringing encouragement to one so often sick and suffering. It is interesting to find her affording the like solace, though in a greater and more intimate degree, to another invalid, Elizabeth Barrett,

when not as yet the wife of Robert Browning. She it was who met the Brownings in Paris on their wedding journey, and though she found their imprudence the height of prudence, was constrained to wonder how two poets' hearts and poets' heads would get on in this prosaic world. Her own practical capabilities seem to have especially endeared her to contemplative and reflective spirits.

Mrs. Coleridge owed her first introduction to her to her friendly correspondent Mr. Kenyon, of whom Crabb Robinson wrote: "He has the face of a Benedictine monk, and the joyous talk of a good fellow . . . and delights at seeing at his hospitable table every variety of literary notabilities."

He was indeed generally known in London society for his agreeable conversation, genial manners, and his desire to place all that he possessed at other people's disposal. He was a distant cousin of the Barretts, and Mrs. Browning writes of his "princely nature, in which you might put your trust more reasonably than in Princes." Mrs. Coleridge seems to have felt a like confidence, and she writes to him freely even on the subject of his cousin's poems. Almost the last time she dined out she met the Brownings at his house. She noted Mrs. Browning's pale face and plaintive voice, and found something very impressive in her dark eyes and brow. "Her general aspect puts me in mind of Mignon—what Mignon might be in maturity and maternity. She has more poetic genius than any other woman living—perhaps more than any other woman ever showed, except Sappho." Then she proceeds to a somewhat severe criticism of the feminine impetuosity

and inequalities of her verse, and is inclined to believe no woman could rise to real pre-eminence except in fiction, in which department of literature she believes they are fitted to surpass men.

Amongst her other friends and correspondents there were two Americans, with one of whom, Professor Henry Reed, of the University, Philadelphia, her relations were very intimate. He was the author of "Lectures on English Poetry and Literature," and he had made her subjects his own. He perished in the loss of the *Arctic*, in 1854.

It was of him that Thackeray wrote in one of those letters which shed a pure and tender light upon a memory and a grave. "He seemed to me to have all the sweet domestic virtues which make the pang of parting only the more cruel to those who are left behind; but that loss what a gain to him! A just man summoned by God, for what purpose can he go but to meet the Divine Love and Goodness? I never think about deploring such; and as you and I send for our children, meaning them only love and kindness, how much more Pater Noster." And then he speaks of the pictures in his room which made him see how his thoughts lay, and his "sweet melancholy pious manner," and the descriptive touches appear to explain the character of his intimacy with Sara Coleridge.

Mr. Ellis Yarnall—another American—saw Mrs. Coleridge for the first time in 1849. "I see her now," he writes, "as she entered her pretty drawing-room, her pale face, her complexion almost transparent, her eyes large and of a peculiar lustre." He speaks of her gentle cordiality and her personal attraction as they conversed



(evidently at interminable length) upon some of her favourite subjects—Wordsworth's poetry, the Tractarian movement, and the English Church. Another conversation lasted for an hour and a half, and again she talked "with peculiar animation, there was a glow of genius in her face—a radiant expression that put one under a spell." Yet there was a "look almost of languor in her eyes; an undefined something showing that her health might be frail."

During the three years that followed after his return to America they exchanged many letters; one of no less than fourteen large letter sheet pages. He read it again and again, struck with "its wisdom, its felicity of expression, its keen and subtle criticism on literary matters." But they never met again, her death occurring whilst he was on his passage back to England.

Thus it will be seen that in these last years there was much to vary and enrich her life; and after Hartley's death she had one engrossing interest in the collection for publication her brother Derwent was making of his poems and prose writings.

The sense of loss deepened as time went on. She recalled his many lovable qualities and all the affection they had awakened. The Wordsworths were dearer to her than ever for the tender care bestowed upon him. "You should have heard," she writes, "the old man say, 'Well, God bless him!' and turn away in tears." She relates how some one, on being told how little altered his countenance was after death, had replied, "Is it strange that death should not be able to force a mask on him who in his lifetime never wore one?" She goes back in spirit to the days at Keswick—"that



early life with which Hartley is so connected that it seems strange to be left here without him." She never knew any man more wept for out of his own immediate circle.

The dividing of his books had been a melancholy task. It was strange to find no Shakespeare or Milton among them, except the latter in Anderson's poets. The collection of his poems went on; they "spring up here and there and almost everywhere, like flowers in April"; and in 1850, when the volumes were in the press, she had warm expectations that they would interest one circle at least of readers very deeply.

The Memoir and Poems were published in 1851, and the Prose works somewhat later on, and she had no cause to be disappointed.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### HARTLEY COLERIDGE AS A POET

Hartley's poetry—Early influences—Its varying moods—Poems on Nature—And on children—His poetic gifts and its limitations

IT is not surprising to find that Hartley Coleridge's poems, collected by his brother Derwent, published in 1851 with a prefatory Memoir, and again recently reissued with some additions in the "Muse's Library," though rich in fancy and felicitous diction, are often the meditative records of very ordinary incidents.

He belonged to a school whereof the teachers, repudiating the artificial canons and sentiments of the eighteenth century, had sought their inspiration at the shrine of truth and in the heart of nature: "and poetry could never again be content to dance in a court dress with Pope, or go through a course of gymnastics with Dryden, or to sit by the fireside with Cowper, or to mount the pulpit with Young."

"The age grew sated with her sterile wit,  
Herself waxed weary on her loveless throne.  
Men felt life's tide, the sweep and surge of it,  
And craved a living voice, a natural tone."

Imagination sought a higher region, a purer air. The office of poetry was not only to allure and captivate, but to instruct and exalt ; and, above all, to be the authoritative exponent of beauty both in the moral and physical world.

For the unrestrained and devastating force of passion, destructive of lawful barriers and high ideals, Wordsworth had a severe condemnation and an instinctive repugnance. With reverential delight he had looked into "the face of common things," and found, by reason of his love and reverence, their true interpretation. Moreover, the earnestness and dignity of his intellectual creed impressed itself upon thoughtful and cultivated minds, and led them on to a clearer appreciation of natural grace and truth.

At Wordsworth's side and in the study of his poetry, Hartley (though by no means blind to the defects and limitations of his master) had learned much of the same lore. His verse, both in thought and expression, bears the impress of his close acquaintance with the great poet. Wordsworth himself declared that Hartley's poetry lacked originality : a quality so impossible to define that it is difficult to disprove the assertion ; and undoubtedly his lyrics and sonnets, in their painstaking and restrained purity of diction, are a reflection of the circle wherein he had been brought up, though in many instances displaying a pathos and tenderness of feeling peculiarly his own. It was almost by chance that some of his verse was preserved, for though his verbal memory for poetry was remarkable he could rarely remember his own.

The strange visions of his childhood had vanished, he no longer explored the untrodden tracks of unknown continents to meet with the indistinct and fearful shapes

of beasts and reptiles, nor unrolled the genealogies of the long line of future kings who were to control the destinies of the world. His brain was not disturbed by metaphysical problems, nor his spirit oppressed by nightmare fantasies; unless it might be when, a solitary wanderer, he escaped for awhile from human companionship and the sheltered precincts of home. He knew nothing of the mystic region where his father's poems had had their birth or of "the finer, more delicately marvellous supernaturalism, the fruits of his more delicate psychology, which Coleridge infuses into romantic narrative." Hartley's Muse was, on the contrary, nourished and sustained by the simplest earthly means. He felt, possibly with justice, that pastoral and individual themes were best suited to his abilities. He loved nature in her mildest, most benignant mood. Though a dweller among the mountains, it was only in times of mental distress and under the pressure of an unconquerable desire to be alone that he fled to their wild recesses or their storm-encircled heights. But for the green flowering meadows, the rushes by the still margin of the lake, the springing delicate fern in the crevice of the rock, the pale clustering primroses, the rose-flushed snow of blossoming orchards, and all the offspring, however lowly, of the "breathing spring"; he had the eye of a poet and the heart of a lover.

His poetry was therefore not imitative in any formal sense of the word, but it was to some extent the result of atmosphere and association.

His moods are very various, tender and gay, descriptive rather than creative: the play of fancy like flickering sunlight, rather than the startling lurid gleams of a

storm-tossed imagination. Even in his sadness he catches at each promise of joy, each stirring of gladness in the world around :—

“The little rills  
That trickle down the yellow hills,  
To drive the fairies' water mills.  
And every small bird trilling joyfully  
Tells a sweet tale of hope and love and peace.

. . . . .  
Such themes I sang—and such I fain would sing,  
Oft as the green buds show the summer near—  
But what availeth me to welcome spring,  
When one dull winter is my total year ?  
When the pure snowdrops couch beneath the snow,  
And storms long-tarrying come too soon at last,  
I see the semblance of my private woe,  
And tell it to the dilatory blast.  
Yet will I hail the sunbeam as it flies—  
And bid the universal world be glad—  
With my brief joy all souls shall sympathise—  
And only I, will all alone be sad.”

Thus, though Nature may at times reflect his melancholy, she is more often the consoler, and brings peace and healing in her wings. Still, as he wanders by the quiet waters and seeks the shaded valley or the upland pastures, he can return in spirit to the days to which he refers in one of the first sonnets he ever wrote to “the faithful counsellor of his youth,” R. S. Jameson, afterwards Judge Advocate at Dominica :—

“When we were idlers by the loitering rills,  
The need of human love we little noted ;  
Our love was nature and the peace which floated  
On the white mist and dwelt upon the hills.”



Moreover, he was pre-eminently a poet of fancy, with no rationalistic prejudices to bid him shun enchanted ground, well fitted to wander with Puck and Oberon in a midsummer dream through the green mazes of a fairy wood; yet his observation is so exact and his quest of truth so dominant that no false lights are thrown upon a subject, and he is even austere in his rejection of meretricious effects. His fresh childlike wondering joy in purity and light and the loveliness of earth finds its expression in the simplest epithets.

“ But one fault it hath ;  
 It fits too close to life's realities.  
 In truth to Nature missing truth to Art ;  
 For Art commends not counterparts or copies  
 But from our life a nobler life would shape,  
 Bodies celestial from terrestrial raise,  
 And teach us not jejunely what we are,  
 But what we may be when the Parian block  
 Yields to the hand of Phidias.”

This Art may need the prophetic vision not granted to Hartley when the dreams of childhood had faded; and the poet's criticism, possibly first suggested by Wordsworth's poetry, recalls his own displeased exclamation when he saw Walter Scott taking notes of scenery: “Nature will not permit you to make an inventory of her charms.”

Yet Hartley's minute observation, whether directed to Nature or individuals, was accompanied by a large measure of spiritual insight—more an intuition than a talent. His pictures, subdued in colouring and manifestly true to life, are often mere sketches, recording

some trivial passing fancy or quaint conceit that it pleased him to put into verse. There is nothing to dazzle or bewilder, but much to delight and captivate; and his talent was as apparent to a select circle of literary men as it had been to the poet guardians of his childhood. The grace and music of his versification, the elevation and restraint of his diction, appealed to cultivated critics, whilst his sensibility to natural influences brought the sights and sounds of earth before his readers in a few felicitous words:—

“The snow  
Of sluggard winter bedded on the hill,  
And the small trickle of the frozen rill.

The nightingale grew dumb—the cuckoo fled,  
And broad-eyed summer glared on hill and plain.

The patient beauty of the scentless rose,  
Oft with the Morn's hoar-crystal quaintly glassed,  
Hangs a pale mourner for the summer past,  
And makes a little summer where it grows.”

All these things had a message and a meaning, and he loved them all. At times they were his only solace and refuge, more especially when, after some dark hour of subjection to his fatal infirmity, he shunned alike the companions of his fall and the silent pity of those who loved him best. There were then mysterious absences of which it is probable that only the whispering winds and the babbling streams could have told the story.

At other seasons, though his hearth was lonely

his life was by no means solitary. His pleasant though eccentric ways, his humour, and his conversational gifts commended him to many chance acquaintances for whom he was ready to exercise his light impromptu talent of versification. It was the day of extract books and albums, and upon their pages many of his graceful fancies are inscribed. But it was in the innocence and charms of childhood that he found his truest inspiration. To that pure source he ever returned with fresh and inexhaustible pleasure. Without parental experience he had attained to a genuine and discriminating understanding of the infinite possibilities, the distinctions and significance of life in its earlier stages. The opening year with its unstained blossoms, the pale rose of the dawn, were more to him than the wealth and pride of summer or the full splendour of high noonday. At an infant's shrine he was not only a devout but an instructed worshipper. These small magicians could at any moment dispel his melancholy; "these thriftless prodigals of smiles and tears" were quick to arouse his tenderest affections. No other poet, as Professor Dowden observes, has been the laureate of so many baby boys and girls. It is true that he had been brought up amongst those to whom faith in childhood was an integral part of a poet's creed. To his father it was the anchor to which he clung amidst the wreckage of lost beliefs and treasured hopes. The guardians and friends of his own childhood had owned the same allegiance and with unfailing patience awaited the sometimes capricious or tardy fulfilment of early pledges. In his case, as he was well aware, disappointment, crushing and irrevocable, had fallen

upon their expectations, and those pledges had been unredeemed. But not even the ever-present sense of personal failure could shake his confidence, and the star of hope still shone with mild and inextinguishable radiance over the birthplace and the cradle. Nor was childhood merely an ideal state of which the customs were strange and the language unfamiliar. He had indeed shrunk from the boisterous spirits or frank insubordination of the ordinary schoolboy and had found his position as a teacher intolerable, but little girls and babies had an especial attraction for him. The helplessness of childhood, the infirmities of age, and the sufferings of dumb animals awakened all his best sympathies and filled him with a passion of pity; and so it comes to pass that a large proportion of his poems are addressed to children, who shall enter heaven at the last great day,

"Alike all blessed, and alike all fair,  
And only God remembers who they were."

He always declared that as an infant he had been perfectly conscious of what was passing around him and much regretted his lack of speech.

Again and again he returns to the theme of the gladness and growth of childhood or to the mysterious state of passive infancy, a condition of "exile perfection to a world forlorn!"

"Sure 'tis a holy and a healing thought  
That fills my heart and mind at sight of thee  
Thou purest abstract of humanity."

He reproved those who would assert that the mind whilst dumb is a blank, and saw in every unconscious look and gesture some revelation of the heaven within. Moreover, like a woman, he dwells with a delight, born of intimate knowledge, upon the minute loveliness of form and movement.

"In the mere sentient life  
Of unremembered infancy, whose speech  
Like secret Love's is only smiles and tears."

When he writes of the strong grasp of a baby's hand, of its attitude in sleep, of its sudden spring of joy, its murmured love-notes and indiscriminating kisses, we are not surprised to hear that he might be found in the house of his friends or by a cottage fireside contentedly nursing a baby by the hour—thus giving practical effect to poetic theories.

Of love poems properly so called he gives few examples.

Though fond of women's society, in youth he had been constrained in their presence and hardly ventured to express wishes he felt must remain unfulfilled. Though in his letters and journals, as well as in his poems, he lays bare with unnecessary frankness the blotted records of his past, he can yet thank Heaven that at least no woman has been involved in the calamities that have wrecked his hopes. At no time does he appear to have felt so far worthy of a woman's love as to strive to win for himself a refuge from loneliness and despondency in the consolatory joys and salutary restraints of domestic life. His fancy may



wander free, but he must wake to the consciousness that he is doomed to a solitary existence by his own infirmities.

“It must be so—my infant love must find  
In my own heart a cradle and a grave.”

So he writes in one of his sonnets. And whilst respecting his sentiments one cannot help feeling that love must indeed have been in its infancy or so desirable a self-control might hardly have been attained.

Nevertheless some of his most felicitous verses are inspired by women, never passionate, but graceful and chivalrous, tendered with a half-melancholy yet playful homage from one to whom nearer approach was forbidden, and frequently, like the following stanza, not only beautiful in diction but faithful in portraiture.

“She was a queen of noble Nature’s crowning,  
A smile of hers was like an act of grace ;  
She had no winsome looks, no pretty frowning,  
Like daily beauties of the vulgar race :  
But if she smiled, a light was on her face,  
A clear cool kindliness, a lunar beam  
Of peaceful radiance, silvering o’er the stream  
Of human thought with unabiding glory ;  
Not quite a waking truth, not quite a dream,  
A visitation bright and transitory.  
But she has changed—hath felt the touch of sorrow ;  
No love hath she, no understanding friend.  
Oh ! grief when heaven is forced of earth to borrow  
What the poor niggard earth hath not to lend.  
But when the stalk is snapt, the rose must bend,  
The tallest flower that skyward rears its head,

Grows from the common ground and there must shed  
 Its delicate petals. Cruel fate, too surely  
 That they should find so base a bridal bed,  
 Who lived in virgin pride so sweet and purely.

'Tis vain to say—her worst of grief is only  
 The common lot which all the world have known ;  
 To her 'tis more because her heart is lonely,  
 And yet she hath no strength to stand alone—  
 Once she had playmates, fancies of her own,  
 And she did love them. They are past away  
 As Fairies vanish at the break of day—  
 And like a spectre of an age departed  
 Or unsphered angel woefully astray—  
 She glides along—the solitary hearted."

Some charming poems are addressed to his Southey cousins and other girl relations, and one sonnet to "A Lofty Beauty from her Poor Kinsman," demands a place in any review of his poetry.

"Fair maid, had I not heard thy baby cries,  
 Nor seen thy girlish sweet vicissitude,  
 Thy mazy motions striving to elude,  
 Yet wooing still a parent's watchful eyes,  
 Thy humours many as the opal dyes,  
 And lovely all ; methinks thy scornful mood,  
 And bearing high of stately womanhood,—  
 Thy brow where beauty sits to tyrannize  
 O'er humble love, had made me sadly fear thee ;  
 For never sure was seen a royal bride,  
 Whose gentleness gave grace to so much pride—  
 My very thoughts would tremble to be near thee ;  
 But when I see thee at thy father's side,  
 Old times unqueen thee, and old loves endear thee."

But multiplied extracts would fail to give a true idea of the variety and scope of his poetic talent, so frequently and easily exercised as by its very facility to persuade him to make light of its claims.

The fugitive character of his poetry, very unequal in merit, and seldom evincing sustained effort, was partly the outcome of abundant but unregulated leisure, and partly the result of a desultory mind. His attempt at a longer consecutive narrative, "Leonard and Susan," has no great interest. It is somewhat prosaic in conception and has no dramatic force, whilst the tragedy is depressingly grim and grey. It would almost seem as if a personal theme could alone evoke the full expression of his poetic gifts. For their development he was eager to recognize the debt he owed to parental influence and education, and it was acknowledged in the Dedicatory Sonnet prefacing the first edition of his Poems.

"Father and Bard revered ! to whom I owe,  
Whate'er it be, my little art of numbers  
Thou, in thy night-watch o'er my cradled slumbers,  
Didst meditate the verse that lives to show  
(And long shall live, when we alike are low)  
Thy prayer how ardent, and thy hopes how strong,  
That I should learn of Nature's self the song,  
The love which none but Nature's pupils know.  
The prayer was heard : I 'wandered like a breeze'  
By mountain brooks and solitary meres,  
And gathered there the shapes and fantasies  
Which, mixed with passions of my sadder years,  
Compose this book. If good therein there be,  
That good, my sire, I dedicate to thee."

As regards literary influences, he was almost over-

scrupulously anxious to note in an Appendix obligations to other poets or chance reflections of their productions. With a curious mixture of humility and confidence—high hopes of possible attainments easily dashed by a consciousness of weakness and failure—he was inclined to form too low an estimate of his poetry. In respect to metre and diction it may have been the result of close and critical study of great masters in the art, but the motive and the thought was individual and natural. It resembled an air played with executive delicacy upon a fine and intricate instrument. Nevertheless his own lines sincerely represent his conception of his powers and limitations.

"No hope have I to live a deathless name  
 A power immortal in the world of mind,  
 A sun to light with intellectual flame  
 The universal soul of human kind.

Not mine the skill in memorable phrase  
 The hidden truths of passion to reveal,  
 To bring to light the intermingling ways,  
 By which unconscious motives darkling steal.

I have no charm to renovate the youth  
 Of old authentic dictates of the heart,—  
 To wash the wrinkles from the face of Truth,  
 And out of Nature form creative Art."

And yet he can claim to have sought and seen the vision and the gleam, and to have spent his life in the unrequited service of

"Divinest Poesy!—'tis thine to make  
 Age young, youth old—to baffle tyrant Time,  
 From antique strains the heavy dust to shake,  
 And with familiar face to crown new rhyme.

Long have I loved thee—long have loved in vain,  
Yet large the debt my spirit owes to thee,  
Thou wreath'dst my first hours in a rosy chain,  
Rocking the cradle of my infancy.

The lovely images of earth and sky  
From thee I learn'd within my heart to treasure ;  
And the strong magic of thy minstrelsy  
Charms the world's tempest to a sweet sad measure.

Nor Fortune's spite—nor hopes that once have been—  
Hopes which no power of fate can give again—  
Not the sad sentence—that my life must wean  
From dear domestic joys—not all the train

Of frequent ill—and penitential harms  
That dog the rear of youth unwisely wasted,  
Can dim the lustre of thy stainless charms  
Or sour the sweetness that in thee I tasted."

His personal poems, though they never strike the deeper notes of passion, have been well described as "detaining the fleeting lights of a most affectionate fancy. Those lights might sometimes be called lunar gleams ; but they are the moonlight of a warm climate."

Of all the modern poets he may perhaps be said to display the strongest likeness to Charles Turner Tennyson. From the remote Lincolnshire Vicarage, from the man of saintly character and the minister of Christ, there come strains which might almost be mistaken for those of the Vagabond minstrel.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### HARTLEY COLERIDGE'S PROSE

Hartley Coleridge's prose—"Lives of the Northern Worthies"—Collected Essays—William Roscoe—Congreve—Andrew Marvel—The Ghost in "Hamlet"—The Jews—General character of "Essays and Marginalia"—Indifference to criticism

**S**ELECTED passages from poems can give but an inadequate, if not misleading idea, of poets whose range and modes of utterance differ as widely as the flight and song of birds. It is even more difficult to convey a true impression of voluminous prose writings by means of extracts.

Hartley Coleridge's pen, when he took it in hand, was ready enough and almost as fluent as his speech ; but, like his poems, of a disconnected character ; or perhaps it would be more correct to say he chose of set purpose subjects which could be confined to the limits of a biographical notice or an article, probably realizing his incapacity for lengthier narratives or larger themes. "There was some faculty wanting in his mind," so his biographer suggests, "for the completion of any great scheme." His hovering imagination, in the difficulty of self-concentration, imprisoned itself within artificial limits, and his language was not merely true to fact but unaffectedly sincere, his own opinions and predi-

lections being subordinated to the attainment of just judgments and historical accuracy.

His object in compiling the "Lives of the Northern Worthies" was to present true and living pictures of the men themselves, only entering upon the proper office of the historian, as apart from that of the biographer, when, as stated in his Preface, "the acts and accidents of the commonwealth are considered in their relation to the individual, as influences by which his character is formed or modified—as circumstances amid which he is placed—as the sphere in which he moves, or the material he works with. The man, with his works, his words, his affections, his fortunes, is the end and aim of all. . . . There is one species of history which may with great propriety be called biographical, to which we do not remember to have heard the name applied ; we mean that wherein an order, institution, or people are invested with personality, and described as possessing an unity of will, conscience and responsibility ; as sinning, repenting, believing, apostatizing, etc. Of this, the first and finest example is in the Old Testament, where Israel is constantly addressed, and frequently spoken of as an individual." And then he adds, that in his present work he professes to do no more than to introduce the reader to the several "Worthies" that may drop in upon him during the course of publication.

The introduction is effected with much pleasant discrimination ; and the diversities of circumstances and characters to be portrayed were no obstacles to his task. To dwell long upon one note was ever an uncongenial effort, and the air even when sustained was liable to be lost in its variations. He was as ready to write about

the soldier and man of action as about the scholar and divine ; though the sketches of Lord Derby and Fairfax are simple narratives affording less scope for reflection and criticism than those of Roger Ascham, Congreve, and William Roscoe.

In writing of the last more especially he wanders off the beaten track into various agreeable by-ways of desultory meditation and suggestion. Roscoe's verse affords an opportunity to descant upon the proper definition of lyrical poetry : " If there be anything that generally distinguishes the genuine lyricist, it is the nature of his connections and transitions, which do not arise from the necessities of his theme, far less from the arbitrary turns of his convenience, but are determined by the flux and reflux, the undercurrents and eddies of the poetic passion, of that sense of power and joy which a poet feels in the exercise of his art for his own sake ; a passion easily mimicked, but not often real, even in those who possess every other requisite of pure poetry."

Roscoe's politics again awaken responsive chords in his own free spirit. In reference to the French Revolution Hartley acknowledges that the "better few while they abhorred oppression and coveted not privilege yet knew in their hearts that 'the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God'" ; but yet he understood that Roscoe, "loving liberty as he loved the human race with a soul cheerful as daylight and hopeful as spring, should join the joyful chorus. To see a monarch descended from a long line of sensual despots co-operate with a nation long idolatrous of despotism, in realizing a perfect freedom upon earth—a freedom embodied in laws and institutions which should be the limbs, organs,

and senses of the moral will—whose vital heat was universal love, was too great, too glorious, too new a spectacle to give him time for doubt or question. The black and portentous shadow which the past ever throws on the future, fell beyond his sphere of vision." So Hartley writes of Roscoe's "emotions at the first heavings of that great convulsion, and of the gladness of hopes which he was not quick to relinquish when many years of bloodshed had passed over them."

And then in a note he abruptly quits the subject of Lyrical Poetry and the French Revolution to engage in a dissertation on bookbinding. "The binding of a book should always suit its complexion. Pages venerably yellow should not be cased in military morocco, but in sober brown Russia. . . . We have sometimes seen a collection of old whitey-brown black-letter ballads so gorgeously tricked out that they remind us of the pious liberality of the Catholics, who dress in silk and gold the images of the saints, part of whose saintship consisted in wearing rags and hair-cloth. The costume of a volume should also be in keeping with its subject, and with the character of its author. How absurd to see the works of William Penn in flaming scarlet and George Fox's Journal in Bishop's purple!"

Congreve again is a congenial theme, prompting moral reflections. "After a certain point," he writes, "there needs no adventitious advantages to conciliate regard to the perfections and achievements of intellect. The danger is that they will be too much prized, too much desired, too much sought for. Already there are many who expect from human knowledge the work of Divine Grace. Science has made man master of matter; it has



enabled him to calculate all the revolutions of nature, to multiply his own powers beyond all that was dreamed of spell or talisman; and now it is confidently prophesied that another science is to remove all the moral and political evils of the planet; that by analysing the passions we shall learn to govern them; and that, when the science of education is grown of age, virtue will be taught as easily as arithmetic, and comprehended as readily as geometry—with the aid of wooden diagrams. Let us not be deceived. 'Leviathan is not so tamed.' The tree of knowledge is not the tree of life."

And in a rapid survey of Congreve's character he affirms: "He seems to have been one of those indifferent children of the earth, 'whom the world cannot hate'; who are neither too good or too bad for the present state of existence, and who may fairly expect their portion here." "His comedies," he acutely observes, "are too cold to be mischievous; they keep the brain in too incessant inaction to allow the passions to kindle."

In the midst of the narrative now and again some shaft of criticism or sidelight of personal experience is thrown across the page. In his review of Andrew Marvell's Poems he writes: "They have much of that over-activity of fancy, that remoteness of allusion which distinguishes the school of Cowley. But though there are cold conceits, a conceit is not necessarily cold. The mind in certain states of passion finds comfort in playing with occult or casual resemblances and dallies with the echo of a sound."

The Lives fill a large octavo volume of 632 pages; but the volume is loosely put together. Grave and gay, biographical or critical, they do not greatly contribute



to Hartley's literary reputation, though they are the strongest example of a periodic fit of industry. There is, moreover, a robustness and vigour in the style sometimes lacking in his more voluntary and spontaneous writings. He has put himself to school and forms his letters after a correct and approved fashion. It is evidently task-work executed with diligence and care.

The two volumes of "Essays and Marginalia," edited by his brother and published by Moxon in 1851, are more truly representative of the tendencies of his mind, and the style, whilst less studied, is fuller of attractive images and expressive language. The stream of thought no longer flows in an ordered channel, but eddies and ripples in sunlight and shade, full of bright shifting reflections, suddenly turning into sparkling shallows of fancy or profounder depths of wisdom.

According to one of his reviewers, he has caught the trick of Elia's mock gravity. It would be truer to say that a like temperament finds expression in the transforming gleams thrown upon ordinary objects. There are phrases which might have been written by Stevenson, and there are reminiscences of his father's "Table Talk"; but both thoughts and words are Hartley's own, not his by adoption. He had been brought up in a special school of poetry, and though there is at times an imitative quality in his verse, it is rarely, if ever, to be detected in his prose. Indeed, had he desired it, he would have required greater powers of application, and at least some principles of systematized thought, if he would have either moulded his mind or founded its expressions upon those of other writers. His actual mode of writing, here, there, and everywhere, upon the

margins of books—jotting down upon any spare piece of paper some grave reflection, apt quotation, or fragment of verse as he sat by the wayside or walked along the road—was an illustration of the manner in which images presented themselves to his mind, each distinct in itself but with no sequence or order.

It would be an interesting, though for the purpose of a Memoir, too long a study, to contrast his paper upon "Hamlet," with his father's lecture upon the same subject; but his observations upon the doctrine of Purgatory with the Ghost for his text are too true to his own fashion of looking at every subject from different points of view, not to be quoted.

"It is not easy to reduce this Ghost to any established creed or mythology. . . . He talks like a good Catholic; though some commentators have taken pains to prove, by chronological arguments, that he must be a Pagan. A Pagan, however, would scarce complain that he was cut off

"Unhousel'd, disappointed, unaneled."

And yet would not a true Catholic spirit have requested prayers and masses, rather than vengeance?

"Some persons, from these allusions to Popish practices, have inferred that Shakespeare himself was a Papist. If he were, let us hope that before his death he reconciled himself to a Church which, considering the theatrical turn of many of her own ceremonies, deals rather scurvily with players and play-writers. But first, the doctrine of Purgatory does not imply Popery, though the Priesthood have contrived to turn it to excellent account. It is older than Christianity itself; it has been

the professed belief of many Protestants, and, it is more than probable, the secret hope of many more; and secondly, on what other hypothesis could the ghost have been introduced with equal effect? A mere shade or Eidolon were too weak a thing to bear the weighty office imposed on this awful visitation. Would men at any time have believed in the descent of an emancipated soul from heaven, to demand vengeance on a wretched body for sending it thither? Or could they have sympathised in the wrongs of a 'goblin damned'? Is not the desire of revenge, even upon an adulterous murderer, one of the imperfections that must be 'burned and purged away'?" And it is not until after some further explorations of side-issues that he comes back to the subject of the Play itself.

In these two volumes we find a medley of subjects jostling one another and finding themselves in strange company. An article on "Black Cats" is followed by one on "Melancholy." As Ignoramus he discourses on the Fine Arts, and does not think himself above writing a paper upon "Pins." There is a little sermon on "Pride" and one on "Church Sectarianism"; a chapter upon "Old Age"; another on "Passive Imagination and Insanity"; there are observations betraying an unclouded spiritual insight, several subtle pieces of analysis; a whole phalanx of moral reflections, and, scattered with a liberal hand across the pages, many execrable puns.

Still there is often a serious strain to be discerned even when, with evident and easy unconcern, he allows some passing fancy to direct his pen.

"I wish I was a Jew," he writes. ". . . Neither avarice nor amativeness prompt this strange hankering. I envy

not the Jew his bargains ; I covet not his wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor anything that is his, except his pedigree and his *real* property in the Holy Land. . . . The tree of his genealogy is the oak of Mamre. His family memoirs are accounted sacred, even by his worst enemies. He has a portion far away—in the land of imagination, the scene of the most certain truths, and of the wildest fictions. He may at least feed his fancy with the product of his never-to-be-seen acres ; and though forbidden to possess a single foot of ground, may rank himself with the landed aristocracy.

“A strange passion possessed the European nations of deriving their origin from the thrice-beaten Trojans. Even the Greeks caught the infection. So enamoured are mankind of a dark antiquity—so averse to consider themselves the creatures of a day—that not content with the hope of a future immortality, they would fain extend their existence through the dusk backward and abysm of time, and claim a share even in the calamities of past generations. How great, then, the prerogative of the Jew whose nation is his own domestic kindred ; who needs not to seek his original amid the dust of forgetfulness, and the limitless expanse of undated tradition, but finds it recorded in the Book that teaches to live and to die.”

Some short commentaries upon life and its problems bear a stronger stamp of individual conviction :—

“A human ruin is not a ruined temple.”

“No man is to be trusted when he is wilfully moralizing.

“The strength of will in suffering is secure of victory— but action is obliged to borrow hope from contingency ; and let a man be never so stout in purpose, he knows not



but another as stout may be stronger-limbed, or better-weaponed, or more cunning in fence, or higher in the favour of Destiny; and he whom certain death could not subdue, is oft-times vanquished by the possibility of defeat. . . . Pains of all sorts are intolerable when they make us conscious of weakness. To be weak is miserable.

"Power—the power of will felt and manifested—is the proper joy of man, as he is *man*, neither exalted above, or sunk below, his proper nature. If pain, peril, or pangs of death, bring this power into distinct consciousness—then may pain, peril, death, become things of choice and pride."

To turn over the papers of these essays (many of them originally written for "Blackwood's Magazine") is to find oneself, as it were, wandering through the various glades of one wood. The same hand has been at work. Here a space has been cleared, there the undergrowth almost obliterates the track; or, again, we find an unexpected dusky thicket bordering an interspace of sunshine; but the spirit of the wood inhabits them all. Art may have laid its touch upon Nature, but we can discover no traces of artificial culture or restraint. Hartley has been thinking aloud and he has put down his thoughts upon paper, hardly pausing to subject them to mental scrutiny or verbal revision.

"Affectation is the hypocrisy of manners, as hypocrisy is the affectation of morals;" so Hartley wrote, and he knew as little by personal experience of the one as of the other.

Many faults might be discovered by the professional critic, and a student might be reasonably dissatisfied



with pages of the "Essays and Marginalia." These last were written merely to please himself and with no idea of publication. Yet their posthumous issue was no unwarrantable intrusion upon his privacy. Hartley's wares were ever freely at the disposal of any passer-by. He would have never desired to put a price upon them.

Moreover, he had an indifference to literary criticism all the more remarkable when taken in conjunction with his earlier sensitiveness to personal slights and censures ; and quite at variance with the usual temper of contemporaneous authors.

At a time when reviewers had it in their power to deal death-blows, not only to the reputation of writers but to their very existence ; when his father could be made profoundly wretched by disparagement or neglect, and Landor, in bitter resentment, thought it the right and reasonable result of his affection for Southey to break off his friendship with Wordsworth who, using less sententious words than was his custom, had declared "he would not give a shilling a ream for Southey's poetry" ; when even Lamb (so happily impervious, as a rule, to more legitimate causes of offence) could feel that Coleridge had in an almost unforgivable manner outraged his feelings and run the risk of destroying their friendship, by writing of him in a poem as "My gentle-hearted Charles" ; Hartley took blame and praise with almost equal equanimity ; neither depressed by the one, nor unduly elated by the other ; having a spirit, as he declared, "That would not be snuffed out by an article."

## CHAPTER XXV

### SARA'S LAST YEARS

Reviews of Hartley's works—Position of religious parties—The Gorham judgment—Sara Coleridge's letter on Baptismal Regeneration—Aubrey de Vere's conversion—Mrs. Coleridge's views upon his change—Friendship with Miss Fenwick—Inevitable and increasing weakness—Her last illness—Letter to de Vere—Death the Reconciler

THERE were many important reviews and criticisms of Hartley Coleridge's works, amply vindicating the high opinion of them already entertained by some of the best judges; but none of them evidenced so sympathetic an apprehension of his unusual gifts as an article by Aubrey de Vere. It gave unqualified gratification to his sister. She writes to him to express her "grateful delight" and feels certain that no one could have better understood, more truly portrayed Hartley's character, or displayed more poetic insight in the criticisms of his verse. Extracts from the article most emphatically corroborate her words.

"Poetry was not with him," he writes, "an accomplishment cultivated in the spirit of the man of letters. Neither was it an ethical art embodying the speculations of an abstract intelligence. His Muse never lifted either the trumpet of the moral Prophet, or the lyre

of the rapt and mystic Bard. She neither sent him with a commission of rebuke or exhortation, nor secluded him from the strife of tongues. She interpreted between him and his neighbours ; she freshened and brightened the daily face of Nature ; she sweetened the draught of an impoverished life, and made atonement to a defrauded heart." The comment is as true as it is sympathetic ; and the whole tone of the article was such as to awaken a response in the hearts of those who had known Hartley best.

Mrs. Coleridge's correspondence with de Vere had been constant, although from 1846 to 1850 he had been less often in London, and it was in 1850-51 that they were most frequently together. Their last interview in 1846 had been one of four hours ; "a pleasant and affectionate interview, mixed up with theological discussion." He was then still inclined to look with distrust upon the extreme men of the Tractarian party. He had been reading Newman's "Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine." "The theory," he observes, "is an interesting theological experiment, and a brilliant imagination plays on the cloud palace. I have found out, however, some tremendous sophisms in such parts of the argument as needed to be strong. . . . His argument does not seem to me to shake the true Catholic doctrine at all—hardly to touch it."

The "cloud palace" was now, however, assuming a more definite and attractive form, and he saw something "based on earth but irradiated from Heaven, which changes not in a world of change and on whose impassive brow are written strength and peace."

He had not arrived at convictions and had no wish

to influence those of others ; nevertheless, the one subject was absorbing his whole attention. He had become very intimate with Manning, and was discarding many hitherto cherished beliefs in the ultimate triumph of Catholic principles in the Anglican Communion.

No one could deny that it was somewhat in the position of a beleaguered city ; many weak points were unguarded, and the faithful garrison who remained at their post to strengthen its defences were not only perplexed by the unwise conduct of weak and misguided commanders, but were even more hopelessly disheartened by the desertion of their ablest companions and dearest friends.

The Gorham judgment on Baptismal Regeneration was tending to the unsettlement of many minds ; and a letter of enormous length upon the subject addressed by Sara Coleridge to Aubrey de Vere indicates as plainly as possible the ever-widening gulf between them.

It would be obviously unfair to make extracts from what is in fact an elaborate theological treatise, written, as she asserts, after the fullest and deepest consideration she could give to the subject. It seems enough to say that the very highest doctrine of Baptism she considered to be consistent with the right scriptural and substantial view of regeneration, was neither in accordance with the teaching of the Universal Church nor with the formularies of the Church of England itself, and was certainly not such as to carry weight with her correspondent, who had in fact arrived at a position from which (however untenable it might appear to the bystander) no retreat was possible.

Mrs. Coleridge was less dependent upon de Vere than she had been on former occasions. The intellectual companionship of men had been especially congenial to her, for few women had any real knowledge of the subjects upon which she most delighted to converse; yet now in the hour of her weakness she had a stronger craving for the maternal sympathy of an older woman, and one to whose strong spirit sorrow was no stranger.

Miss Fenwick, the friend of the Wordsworths, and the cousin of Henry Taylor, was pre-eminently fitted to console and sustain her in her time of need.

Hartley had once asserted that though Miss Fenwick's main object in this life was to fit herself for a better, she never calculated how far any given act was to advance her on the road; and it was an instinctive attraction, rather than premeditated kindness, which sent her upon missions of consolation wherever there was a wrong to be redressed or a sorrow to be borne.

"Your friendship, dear friend," Sara Coleridge writes in 1851, "has been one of the greatest blessings of these last years of my life. . . . My gratitude to you is one of my deepest feelings." In her trial it was a support to have one at hand whose heart, however pitiful, was not wrung, like that of her children, by the growing certainty that her disease was one no earthly physician could cure. This certainty had been for some time her own. With patient courage she had consented to try each remedy urged upon her by friends or doctors, but it was an unavailing struggle, and she might now legitimately seek repose.

"I am resigned and patient," she had written to Miss Fenwick in September, 1850, when the full knowledge



of her critical condition was first made known to her, "if not strong or firm in mind. My nerves may rise up when more used to the new prospect. At present they are laid like wheat-stalks beneath a thunderstorm."

She accepts her fate with a rare combination of gentleness and courage, and still in her humility fails to perceive that the truest courage is not to know no fear, but to breast the current and face the storm even when most afraid.

There had ever been an heroic element in her nature. With severe self-restraint, she had, after her husband's death, forborne, as she said, to be always at close quarters with sorrow. The radiance of spirit, so often noted by her contemporaries and associates, was still there; but the story of these last months of increasing suffering and weakness recalls Hazlitt's dictum on her father's eyes, that their lustre was the lustre of a darkened sea. It is a curiously strong testimony to her singleness of mind that from such very various quarters we have precisely the same impression of her individuality.

"What a wonder of insight, understanding, knowledge, imagination, and critical *vis* and womanly sweetness, that Sara must have been!" So Dr. John Brown writes to Henry Taylor. "She justifies her father's existence if it needed it." And the corroboration of his assertion is unqualified: "Mrs. Henry Coleridge was all that you say."

To the last the unity of character remained unbroken. Though without Hartley's disposition to review thoughts and actions with the interested, but impartial, judgment of an irresponsible person, she could give a clear account of her own mental qualities and sensibilities.

During her years of happiness she had looked upon mere cheerfulness "as a weed, the natural wild product of the soil which must spring up of itself." Afterwards she made the determination not to "sink into an aimless inert despondency," and had even an "upper stratum of cheerfulness in her mind more fixed than in her happy married days; though it was only an upper stratum." In the hour of danger, and beneath the shadow of death, she could commit herself, with the same calm resolution and without reserve to the merciful protection of Almighty Love.

The hardly won calm in which she habitually dwelt was, however, troubled by tidings giving sure warning of an inevitable breach.

From January, 1850, to the day of his reception into the Roman Catholic Communion on 15 November, 1851, Aubrey de Vere addressed a great many letters to Sara Coleridge upon questions connected with the step he was about to take. And he wrote to her on the very day of his reception, probably realizing that he had no other friend likely to be so deeply affected by this final move. It is clear she had anticipated it, but the actual blow was none the less heavy.

He had been so preoccupied and perturbed by the second great "Ecclesiastical exodus," as he called it, then in progress, that she had even wished he might set out earlier for Italy and "change our movements and controversies for the poetical quietude of a sojourn in the eternal city."

"What is Mr. de Vere about?" she had written a little while before to his cousin, Mrs. Henry Taylor. "I wish he would poetize or political economize instead of spend-

ing all his time idealizing Rome." And again : " In all his eloquent letters and in all his other letters and discourses not a shadow of a reason can I find for his change of mind and feeling."

Nor was the tone of his letters after the change, though full of gracious solicitude to avoid any shadow of an estrangement, exactly calculated to allay soreness. He dwelt upon the heights to which great minds like her father's and Carlyle's might have risen had they been members of the Communion to which he now belonged, and contrasted the freedom of thought there to be enjoyed with the utterly *negative* character of that freedom outside the Roman Catholic Church. Mrs. Coleridge, who had no idea of accepting his premisses, was hardly likely to be led to the same conclusions. His confidence, though mingled with sincere personal humility, was such as to repel a mind inclined to weigh authoritative expositions of doctrine in its own balances and find them wanting.

To say that there was some bitterness upon her side, from which he was exempt, is only to acknowledge her to be a woman ; yet it must not be forgotten that they were in entirely different positions. She was still tossing upon troubled waters, whilst he, in an alien bark, had attained to a region of calms from which he waved her an affectionate but gay farewell. Moreover, the sense of parting must always weigh more heavily upon those who are left behind than upon those who have voluntarily separated themselves from old ties and associations, and have, in their own opinion, compensations lacking to those who remain.

There are, of course, many friendships not likely to

be affected by an event of this kind ; but these are not formed upon the mutual religious tendencies and beliefs constituting the strongest factors in the friendship between Sara Coleridge and Aubrey de Vere. Though stationed at different posts, and carrying different weapons, they had served under the same flag, and now his withdrawal (although the result of the purest and most disinterested motives) was an act likely to be misconstrued, even by those who had no interest in the quarrel and nothing at stake. Such was not Mrs. Coleridge's position. The years as they passed had deepened her convictions, and intensified her sense of the importance of distinguishing between the divine and human element in their presentation to the understanding. She was more at variance with Anglo-Catholic teachers, and could even rejoice in an anti-Papal demonstration. She conceived it impossible for a Roman Catholic to be conscientiously tolerant, and Aubrey de Vere was too close a friend for her to bear to have him at her side and yet feel him to be apart.

This point of view explains, if it does not justify, the fact that the first consequence of his change was a cessation of intercourse. The proposal seems to have come from her, and in her opinion he accepted it too lightly.

Nevertheless, no vain regrets nor sense of desertion could long obscure the unalterable fidelity of her affection for a friend. Less than two months had passed since they had had direct communications, when, on 21 January, 1852, she wrote to Aubrey de Vere :—

"MY EVER DEAR FRIEND,—I write to you to-day merely to renew our intercourse. I cannot write a

proper letter, but hope to do so in a day or two. . . . These nervous feelings have been increased by a little misgiving—an uncertainty. I have not felt quite sure that you did not acquiesce easily in the cessation of intercourse by letter between us. I know you too well to believe for a moment that any conduct of yours towards an old friend can proceed from any but a right motive.”

And one of the last efforts of her trembling hand is to sign a deed of reconciliation; hardly needed when contrary winds had troubled the surface of a friendship without reaching its depths. There was a peace no disquieting hopes of recovery could now disturb, and she would allow no lightest cloud to rest upon one of the closest intimacies of her later life. Though too weak and suffering any longer to enjoy it, she would keep their pleasant intercourse of mind in unembittered and affectionate remembrance.

“Quand on est malade, il y a de bons moments, on entrevoit la patrie, mais quand on revient a la vie il faut redescendre et s'eloigner du but—cela donne mal du pays,” so a French divine assures us. This homesickness was to come upon Sara Coleridge before her illness reached its final end; but at first, smitten down under the dominion of incurable pain, imprisoned in a city with the pressure of hurrying life about her, her homesickness was for the verdure of the vales, the wide still waters and solitary places, and the mountains amongst which her childhood and youth had been passed.

Just before his death Coleridge murmured: “The scenes of my early life have stolen into my mind



like breezes blown from the spice islands." And his thought is re-echoed in one of his daughter's letters: "You can hardly imagine how my mind hovers about that old well-known churchyard with Skiddaw and the Bassenthwaite hills in sight . . . When our thoughts are from any cause fixed on the grave, how does the early life rise up into glow and prominence, and, as it were, call one back into itself. . . . Oh, Keswick vale I and shall I really die, and never, never see thee again? Surely there will be another Keswick—all the loveliness transfused, the hope, the joy of youth! . . . Oh! this life is very dear to me! The outward beauty of earth, and the love and sympathy of fellow-creatures make it, to my feelings, a sort of heaven half ruined—an Elysium into which a dark tumultuous ocean is perpetually rushing to agitate and destroy, to lay low the blooming bowers of tranquil bliss and drown the rich harvests . . . I am very faint and weak to-day—more so than I have yet been; but I have been as low in nerves often formerly; otherwise I might think that I had entered into the dark valley and was approaching the river of Death. How kind of Bunyan—what a beneficent imagination—to shadow out Death as a *river*, which is so pleasant to the mind, and carries it on into regions bright and fair beyond that boundary stream."

This letter is to Aubrey de Vere (one of several written to him just before he left England in the autumn of 1851), and there is a wandering tone in it, like the fleeting yet curiously intent look a sick person casts upon familiar surroundings. They have assumed a new aspect and suggest novel and bewildering thoughts;

and now and again the walls are opened to disclose a fairer, clearer vision beyond.

From that vision she was recalled by fluctuating accesses of strength, but she was no longer engaged in that most weary of all conflicts—the conflict with Death, the inevitable conquerer.

Hartley, the laggard, had made no delay at his departure. Ten days' only of sickness, and by a sudden fortunate turn in the broken road he had reached his journey's end. To Sara, though with a clearer light upon it, the way was longer and more difficult. It was almost imperceptibly that her strength declined, and she had been dwelling for more than a year in the undefined borderland between this world and the next, before the dawning of the day (3 May, 1852), when all the problems she had so perseveringly investigated were to be solved, all the enigmas of life explained, and all troubled thoughts for ever laid to rest.

Her homesickness was now for even fairer shores than those by which she had wandered in her youth. She had found Bunyan "very kind" when he wrote of the river of Death. She had waited for the good hour, and "the token was an *Arrow* with a point sharpened by Love, let easily into her heart. . . . So came she forth and entered into the River with a beckon of Farewell to those that followed her to the Riverside."

"Sleep after toyle, port after stormie seas,  
Ease after warre, death after life, does greatly please."

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